

(Re)negotiating the self: homeless women's constructions of home, Homelessness and Identity

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(Re)Negotiating the Self: Homeless Women's Constructions of Home, Homelessness and Identity

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of Sheffield Hallam University
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Abstract

This thesis addresses the oft-neglected experiences of 'homeless' women. It explores how homelessness impacts on women's identities and how this is negotiated and/or resisted. An integrated theoretical framework links homelessness and identity literature with feminist insights surrounding marginalised women.

By centring the experiences and identity-work of homeless women, this thesis contributes to bodies of work on homelessness, women and identity from a feminist perspective. The study advances knowledge of home and homelessness and the relationship between these supposedly binary concepts; and contributes to existing understandings of identity, in relation to marginalised women.

Findings are based on a combination of in-depth qualitative interviews, participant-produced photographs, and follow-up photo-elicitation interviews with twelve women accessing homelessness support services – hostels, supported housing projects, day-centres, and women's centres – in a range of homelessness situations.

This research produced four significant findings. First, home and homelessness were experienced in broader senses than previously found. As home existed in a variety of states, women experienced homelessness in a myriad of ways: homelessness was thus expanded beyond the point of entry into homelessness services. Second, homelessness was felt as a comparative lack. Rather than feeling stigmatised because of their homelessness *in and of itself*, homelessness affected the women in that they saw housing as a measuring stick and came out lacking. Third, homelessness presented an opportunity for re-creation of self *because* of the challenges it raised. While previous literature states that the current homeless self is profaned, this study found women to praise the current self as reformed and wiser despite constraining social factors. Finally, this thesis emphasises the malleability of identity categories and argues that marginalisation is not an outright barrier to reflexivity and creativity. Homeless women performed *other* identities beyond their homelessness, and housing/home experiences are not fixed determinants of identity and self.

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I will forever be indebted to the women who took part in this research; for their honesty, courage and trust in kindly sharing their lives with me. I can only hope that I have done them justice. Thank you to all of the organisations involved for letting me through the door and for their continuing interest and enthusiasm in my work.

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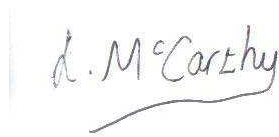
I would also like to thank all of the students and staff at CRESR, for reading my work, for all their insightful feedback at PhD Forums, and importantly, for exchanging PhD-related anxieties with me over cups of tea.

Parts of this thesis were written during difficult times, but it was always this work and the people named here that kept me going.

Candidate's Statement

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Sheffield Hallam University. The work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the thesis has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in this thesis are those of the author:

Signed:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'D. McCarthy', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Date: 10/03/2015

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1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This thesis explores how women experiencing homelessness negotiate their identities. This focus was brought about by two acknowledgments: first, the problematic use of the 'homeless identity' label in society (Pleace, 2005). Discourse (stories and images of homeless people) within media and literature on homelessness works to distort the fluidity and multiplicity of the various identities of people who experience it (Snow and Anderson, 1987). Homeless people's identities are constructed for them, to such an extent that they have become 'objects of discourse' (Pascale, 2005: 261).

The second prompt came from the lack of focus on homeless women in particular – their experiences, identities and resistances to situations (Klodawsky, 2006). As Klodawsky (2006: 366) indicates, women experiencing homelessness have either been forgotten altogether as a category, or have featured only as a reference to illustrate other phenomena. Considering these points together – the invisibility of homeless women from the academic literature as well as the popular inaccurate view of the homeless person as a 'bearded, dirty male' (Austerberry and Watson, 1983; Williams, 2001) – it was clear that a need existed to understand how homeless women responded to, negotiated, and resisted such 'identity-labels' themselves. Homeless women must form and maintain identities whilst navigating and negotiating the stereotypes surrounding their homeless status. This thesis takes the view that homeless women are not without agency and actively negotiate their place in society (Stephen, 2000).

1.2. Invisible Women

According to the most recent government statistics, 13, 520 households were accepted as being homeless and in priority need during the quarter between January and March 2015, an increase of 8 per cent since 2014. At the end of the same quarter, 64, 710 households were in temporary accommodation compared with 58, 410 in 2014 (DCLG, 2015). Although figures on rough sleeping are notoriously inexact, and most likely underestimates, national rough sleeping

counts suggest that this is also on the rise, with 2, 744 people are estimated to be sleeping rough on any one night (of Autumn 2014), an increase of 14 per cent since 2013 (DCLG, 2014). However, research by Reeve (2011) found that the majority of homeless people live outside of mainstream homelessness accommodation.

Although statistics suggest that women are in the minority of the homeless population – a recent report by Homeless Link (2013) found that women make up 26 per cent of clients of homelessness service, or roughly 10, 000 people – many point to the ambiguity of such figures due to unreliable methods of measuring homelessness (Reeve, 2011). These statistics are also two years out-of-date and more recent counts do not provide a breakdown of homelessness by gender.

Homelessness amongst women remains out of sight for a variety of factors. First, few services specifically cater for women's needs, with a decrease in the number of projects targeted at women, from twelve per cent in 2012 to eight per cent in 2013 (Homeless Link, 2013). As a result, women form a disproportionate part of the 'hidden homeless' group, residing temporarily with friends, relatives, neighbours, or 'housed' men, engaging in unwanted sexual liaisons, staying in violent relationships, living in inadequate housing, or sleeping rough in-between (Casey *et al*, 2008: 899).

Second, while representations of homelessness are damaging for both men and women, homeless women, in particular, have suffered a further cultural neglect. Reinforced through the media, literature, film, and hearsay, the public discourse of homelessness carries with it certain negative connotations: victims, addicts, criminals, and 'never-do-wells who are decidedly different from normative ideas of community members' (Clover, 2011: 24). Arguably the most popular image of homelessness is that of the male rough sleeper, or 'the bearded, dirty male' (Austerberry and Watson, 1983; Williams, 2001). Lenon (2000), similarly, argues that homelessness has traditionally been constructed and viewed as a male experience. This obscuration has meant that women's experiences have remained on the margins for too long. When women are not being overlooked completely, they are being misrepresented. Novac *et al* (1996) argue that by the end of the

1980s, the North American public were familiar with the term 'shopping bag ladies' as a reflection of female rough sleepers while Harris (1991) explored images of homeless women to find recurring stereotypes of: victim, exile, predator, and rebel. Rosenthal (2000) identified another category, which he terms the 'lacker position': that is, the depiction of people as homeless because of some deficiency or pathological problem. Paradis (2009: 20) found that a play of all of these stereotypes interweave to construct a representation of the 'disordered homeless woman: pathological and incoherent victim of violence who could turn dangerous at any moment'.

Lastly, both research and literature focusing specifically on homeless women is sparse (Reeve *et al*, 2006). Bowpitt *et al* (2011: 537) posit that 'much past research has taken insufficient account of the gender of homeless people'. More recent scholarship has begun to challenge 'malestream' cartographies of home and homelessness, beginning to place importance on its gendered nature, and argues for a more theoretically sophisticated exploration and understanding of gender within such accounts (Parker, 2011).

1.3. Research Objectives and Questions

This research explores homeless women's negotiations of their identities, in order to further the understandings of homeless women – a group notably absent from popular images of homelessness and homelessness literature – and put women's voices at the core of the research. In doing so, this research seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What does 'home' mean to women who have become homeless?
2. How does a loss of home impact on identity?
3. How do women respond to and/or resist the stigma associated with homelessness?

4. How do women construct their identities within and beyond their homelessness?

1.4. Research Approach

Guided by the acknowledgement that much homelessness literature lacks information about homeless women, I wished to respect the voices of the women in this study, by positioning them as the 'experts' of their own experiences, akin to feminist standpoint epistemology. I envisioned this work from a feminist position in order to privilege the voices of participants who have been historically silenced. While we cannot expect people to fully 'know' and express themselves and their experiences – or for us, as researchers, to be able to fully access that – we can produce interpretations of them in accordance with participants' own interpretations. I used the women's perspectives, my interpretations of them (affected by my own standpoint, education, social background, and political position), as well as theoretical perspectives on identity, to form a picture of their worlds and identities.

1.5. Contributions to Knowledge

This thesis furthers understandings of the concepts of home and homelessness and contributes to existing understandings of the concepts of identity, especially in relation to marginalised groups, women and those experiencing homelessness.

First, this study suggests that homelessness and 'home' are both multi-dimensional concepts. While others have acknowledged the multiplicity of the term 'home' (Haraway, 1985; Young, 2002; Easthope, 2004), rarely has it been argued that there is also more than one homelessness. I suggest that the duality of homelessness is usefully encapsulated by the notion of 'home-loss'. This goes beyond the superficiality of the label and avoids the loaded connotations, binaries and stereotypes of 'homelessness'. Home-loss captures the loss of home-feeling, whatever that might be for a particular woman, and includes feeling home-lessness

in the house, with family, felt at various points in life, and spanning beyond the limits of entering 'homeless' accommodation.

This work also goes beyond studies that show how the stigma of homelessness is resisted (Juhila, 2004; Roschelle and Kaufman, 2004; Harter *et al*, 2005) to illustrate how the experience of homelessness might work to someone's advantage, in acting as a catalyst for re-invention in spite of constraining social and institutional factors. Whereas Boydell *et al* (2000) contend that homelessness is 'a threat to identity' (p. 35) and Snow and Anderson (1987) found ways in which the 'homeless identity' was always something to be overcome or deviated from, this research found that in homelessness, present selves were re-valued and re-evaluated; it was the past that women distanced themselves from. This study therefore adds to the limited body of work focusing on the strengths of homeless people (Montgomery, 1994), and moves away from that which places emphasis on the 'disease aspects' of homelessness (Boydell *et al*, 2000: 36).

1.6. Structure of Thesis

The remainder of this thesis consists of seven more chapters. Chapter Two outlines the theoretical lens, composed of an amalgam of identity theories, which are utilised to shed light on homeless women's negotiation of home, homelessness and identity. It considers the tools of identity-work as well as the contexts in which these performances take place, highlighting the concept of individualisation. Chapter Three provides a discussion of literature relevant to this study, including a questioning of the definitions of homelessness, an exploration of the meanings of 'home', and a consideration of past literature on homelessness and identity. Chapter Four provides an overview of *how* the study was conducted, explaining the study's epistemology, methodological choices, as well as sample selection, recruitment, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations. In addition, this chapter discusses issues that proved challenging from ethical and practical standpoints, including my positionality and how I managed my role as a researcher, and challenges which were exclusive to visual methods. The thesis proceeds to present the analysis of the research findings in Chapters Five, Six and

Seven. Here, the focus is primarily on the women's accounts, linking their observations with concepts outlined in earlier chapters. The first analytical chapter focuses on the supposed link between home and identity, and how it was lived out (or not) in women's narratives. The second findings chapter draws attention to homelessness as a so-called stigmatised social identity, and asks whether and why this was the case for the women here, and how it was managed. The final findings chapter moves beyond stigma and constraining social structures to explore how those with marginalised social identities employ creativity and agency to negotiate the boundaries of these enforced identities. In Chapter Eight, the final chapter, I pinpoint the key original contributions to knowledge; draw findings together; and outline avenues for future research.

2. Conceptualising Identities: A Theoretical Framework

2.1. Introduction

Maxwell (1996: 25) defines a theoretical framework as 'a formulation of what you think is going on with the phenomena you are studying'. Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 4) provide the metaphor of the researcher as *bricoleur*, a 'maker of quilts, or, as in filmmaking, a person who assembles images into montages', which serves as a reminder of the way the investigator works within overlapping perspectives to shed light on aspects of human experience. As Maxwell (1996) states, the theoretical framework consists of borrowed pieces from elsewhere.

There are dangers associated both with not using enough theory and relying on it too heavily (Maxwell, 1996: 36). 'Forcing' a theory onto data can distort the argument and blind the researcher to new ways of framing phenomena. As Lincoln (1990) argues, imposition of a theory on 'data' is an ethical issue, while Skeggs similarly argues that silencing women by trying to fit their experiences into categorisations designed for others 'is to commit yet another act of symbolic violence' (Skeggs, 1997: 168).

On the other hand, without theory there is no structure to help the researcher identify categories in the data and relate them in meaningful ways. Finding middle-ground, this thesis approaches the theoretical framework as a 'lens' through which phenomena are perceived. This thesis takes an empirically grounded approach to qualitative data analysis, following Kelle's (2005: 40) advice: using theories to 'play the role of a..."skeleton" to which the "flesh" of empirically contentful information from the research field is added'.

Glaser and Strauss's (1967: 37) earlier versions of grounded theory, advising researchers 'literally to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study' contain traces of the flawed versions of early empiricism of Francis Bacon and John Locke (Kelle, 2005). These philosophies insisted that the only legitimate forms of theory were those which could be produced purely from observable data from a mind 'free' of any preconceptions. As Kelle (2005: 4) stresses, 'the idea that researchers could approach reality "as it is" if they are prepared to free the mind

from any preconceived ideas whatsoever has fallen into deserved bad reputation in contemporary epistemology'. Inevitable 'preconceived ideas' are made clear, albeit applied as a loose lens rather than strictly 'forced' on data.

As outlined in depth in Section 4.2, this thesis is framed by a broad feminist approach, grounded in feminist values and beliefs, provoking the focus of study (with an overlooked group of marginalised, homeless women); the choice of methods (ones which encourage research 'for' and 'by' rather than 'about' or 'on' women); a commitment to feminist ethical frameworks; and an adherence to a feminist epistemology that attempts to position the participant as expert, and questions 'objectivity' (Cook and Fonow, 1986). The remainder of this chapter zooms in on the next layer: a patchwork of theoretical insights on identity deemed relevant to the study's research aims and questions.

2.2. Identity Matters

This research takes place through, and is bounded within, the lens of various social theories of identity. While insight is taken from feminist theorists it would be limiting to align the theoretical position to one approach. Instead, an amalgam of philosophical perspectives and their critiques are drawn upon, to synthesise them in a manner relevant for the research questions.

This thesis places a focus on identity to look into the ways in which homeless women define themselves and how this interacts with homelessness. The uncritical construction of people with a 'homeless identity' runs the risk of considering homelessness as an all-encompassing characteristic (Brekhus, 2003). For women, such constructions tend to circle around passive imagery. A focus on identity provides a means to redress 'misrecognitions by offering accounts of how people see and define themselves... for a consideration and illumination of many diverse aspects of people's lives' (Parsell, 2010: 66).

(Struggles over) Defining Identity

There is no definitive definition of 'identity' but an array of competing understandings. As a starting point, it is helpful to use Jenkins' (1996) comparisons between self-identity and social identity. Self-identity, while being a reference to the unique-ness of the self, is intrinsically connected to complex interactions with others and the social world. Social identity refers to how individuals respond to others' categorisations of them, whether in terms of gender, 'race', ethnicity, sexual orientation, class or other statuses (Byrne, 2003). Identity links individuals to the world in which they live, and combines how individuals see themselves to how others see them - although this might be a site of conflict.

Self-identity and identity-work do not occur in a vacuum, or isolated in the human mind as if stemming from some innate biological essence or, simply, 'personality'. Linking the agentive self to society is an obvious characteristic of any sociological study, but one which should be explicated as a starting point nonetheless. As well as agentive, intersubjective, and relational, ensuing discussion will also see identity as characterised by similarity and difference (and as a result, inclusion and exclusion); as performative, multiple and conflicting (which may result from the tensions between having to be several different things at once); and as marked by material, physical and social constraints which determine how much control an individual has over constructing it.

2.3. 'The Reflexive Project of the Self' in Late Modernity

Giddens (1991) argues that there is a social structure, which establishes traditions, institutions and moral codes, but it is the repetition of acts by individual agents that reproduces these structures. He has faced critique for presenting an overly simplistic view of the individual as agent, and for downplaying the role of social structures, context, discourse, and history on the production of identities.

Giddens characterises the self as active, not simply a 'cultural dope' determined by external influences but heavily involved in shaping them. The self is intricately bound up with events in the external world, sorting through them to form 'an on-

going 'story' (Giddens, 1991: 54) of self, otherwise referred to as 'the reflexive project of the self'. Giddens locates these questions within a post-traditional, modern order in which self-identity has become an inescapable issue:

What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity – and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour (Giddens, 1991: 70).

Jenkins (2004) argues that reflection on identity should not be thought of as a unique characteristic of late modernity and insists that what Giddens terms the 'reflexive project of the self' is not something in which we are all engaged: 'the many millions of people, in Europe and the US... who do not spend much, or even any, time agonising over 'life narratives' and 'personal growth'...who have other things to fret about'. Asking if self-identity fixation is something in which everyone equally takes part is a valid question; those who have more pressing issues to worry about simply do not have time to reflect on who they are, how to act, and who to be. Jenkins suggests that identity-thinking is a time-consuming activity, far removed from the routine and constancy of ordinary lives. For Giddens though, identity-thinking is so routine and subconscious that it is not acknowledged as something that we *do*. Thinking about one's identity may in fact be prompted by 'things to fret about' or 'an essential problem [that] arises that calls one's habitual character into question' (Boydell *et al*, 2000: 28).

While identity-thinking may not just be a feature of late-modernity, what Giddens (1991) suggests is that this act has been magnified in contemporary societies, in which 'lifestyle' and commodification take on special significance for modern identity construction under western late capitalism' (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 22). Lawler (2008) notes the prevalence of self-help books and lifestyle television programmes where individuals are encouraged to realise their inner selves, or to construct new, better ones. The production of identities has become an inescapable feature of western late capitalism: 'we constantly act upon ourselves to be a certain type of subject; we have little choice but to be tied in to a kind of project of the self, in which the self becomes something to be worked on' (Lawler, 2008: 62).

The approach to identity in this study incorporates these premises: that people do engage in reflection on their self-identity; this is occurring in a culture which encourages this activity on a grand scale; identities are produced (as opposed to deriving from some inner core); and this occurs within a social structure and its traditions, institutions and moral codes.

2.4. Individualisation and Fluid Identities

Some argue that the *individualisation* of life experiences is the defining feature of the postmodern era (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1994), and that it plays an increasingly important role in the creation of meanings of identity (Stephen, 2000). Proponents of the individualisation thesis (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1994; Bauman, 2001) maintain that fragmentation of traditional forms of identification, such as class, gender, family, work, or neighbourhood have given way to fluid, multiple and unstable identities, mirroring the uncertainty and doubt that characterises modern life and an increasingly fluid social world (Beck, 2000; Bauman, 2001). As Bauman and Vecchi (2004: 30) argue, 'locations where the feeling of belonging was traditionally invested (job, family, neighbourhood) are either not available or untrustworthy when they are'.

Another prong of the individualisation thesis concurs with Giddens' (1991) 'reflexive project of the self' in that 'given' forms of identity are supplanted with 'open' practices of personal choice (Mythen, 2005: 132). Individuals are faced with an infinite array of 'do-it-yourself' biographies (Beck, 1994: 15). While this offers scope for creativity and choice for some, for others it poses significant dilemmas: 'all too swiftly the "elective", "reflexive" or "do-it-yourself" biography can become the breakdown biography' (Beck, 1999: 12). Bauman and Vecchi write of this process as one that, for some, is fraught with fear:

Most of the time the joy of selecting an exciting identity is adulterated by fear. We know after all that if our efforts fail because of a dearth of resources or lack of determination, another, uninvited and unwanted identity may be stuck over our chosen and self-assembled one (2004: 38).

Proliferation of choice becomes a constraint. Lines are drawn between those who make the 'right' choices and those who do not. The individualisation thesis' claims have been critiqued as illusory, lacking substantiating empirical evidence, and oversimplified (Savage, 2000; Mythen 2005). Feminist critics argue that gender and other social markers are still significant to structuring identities available to an individual (Walkerdine *et al*, 2001; McRobbie, 2008). Critics of individualisation share the view that class, gender, ethnicity, and place continue to have a profound effect on structuring late modern life (Mythen, 2005). While an individual's identity may be multiple (Lawler, 2008) identity, for some, revolves strongly around a group orientation, family, gender, class, or other relational ties and/or constraints. As Powell (2011: 490) argues, 'while theorizations of social processes may hold true at a general societal level, there is a need to understand how they differ or need to be revised in application to marginal groups and settings'. While this study looks for evidence of individualisation it maintains that relationships play an important part in identity-construction, following Taylor (1989: 36): 'one cannot be a self on one's own'.

2.5. Relational Identities

Relationships and Other Connections

Scholars argue that the individualisation thesis falls short in explaining particular social processes and forms of identifications (Stephen, 2000; Powell, 2011). In her research with homeless women residing in hostels, for example, Stephen (2000: 454) found that 'references to relationships with fellow residents were accorded prominence and were important to interviewees' accounts of institutional life and psychosocial well-being'. Identity is forged through comparative processes, an awareness of and interaction with others: 'consciousness of others is required to make the feeling of a unique self meaningful' (Parsell, 2010: 83). This process consists of reflection on others' (real or imagined) appraisals of selves, which leak into self-perceptions (Burke, 1991; Gecas and Burke, 1995). One similarly relies on others for validation of identity claims (Lawler, 2008).

The theoretical lens, in this thesis, takes into account the significance of interpersonal relationships to the construction of identity, and understands people in terms of their relations with others. It maintains that identity is formed between, rather than within, individuals. In a challenge to the individualisation thesis, it sees the self as partly produced through networks of social connections: '...we can... begin to see [identities] as forged, not within the individual, but in networks of relations with others' (Lawler, 2008: 149).

It is argued that identities are relational in the sense of what (or who) they are not, just as much as what (or who) they are. This reliance on 'not being something else' (Lawler, 2008: 3) is coined the 'constitutive outside' by Butler (1993: 3), and represents all identities that are considered abject but are still a part of an identity:

[Identity] is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, on which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation (Butler, 1993: 3).

As Hall and Du Gay elaborate:

...identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the 'positive' meaning of any term – and thus its 'identity' – can be constructed (1996: 17).

Bearing in mind the concept of the 'constitutive outside' (Hall and Du Gay, 1996), this research pays attention to the way that participants may relate to the 'Other' in constructions of themselves.

2.6. Structure and Agency

Discourse, Power and Imposed Identities

Foucault (1971, 1972) and other scholars (Butler, 1997; Hall, 1997) provide foundational texts for understanding discourse and its constitution of subjects. Hall (1997: 6) defines discourse as 'clusters of ideas, images and practices' that shape

understandings of what knowledge is true in any given context. 'Discursive practices' (Foucault, 1971) draw boundaries around what we accept as 'truth' and 'reality' in society, and boundaries around what we fail to see and what we contest (Patai, 1991). Smith (1999: 36) refers to discourse as 'canons of relevance and validity'. 'Discursive formations' (Foucault, 1971) reinforce already established identities or subjectivities (in terms of gender, sexuality, status or class for example). And as Parsell (2010) contends, the situation is even bleaker for those who are marginalised; more susceptible to having dominant discourse imposed upon them. In terms of homelessness, Pascale (2005: 250) argues that dominant discourse comes from the news media 'rather than from on-going relationships with people living on the street'.

These conceptualisations of discourse assume a one-dimensional and top-down view of power, whereby one mighty actor in society has the ability to wield power over other less dominant subjects. From this perspective, marginalised groups have little control over their identities being dependent on powerful others for verification (Jenkins, 2004). This sentiment would not allow much room for manoeuvre for homeless women to construct and negotiate their own identities within various forms of social constraint. This pessimistic position is reflected in Bauman and Vecchi's statement:

For the disadvantaged in society, access to identity is barred – they are given no say in deciding their preferences. They are burdened with the identities enforced or imposed by others; identities which they themselves resent, but are not allowed to shed (2004: 38).

Theories of discourse and power have since developed along more optimistic lines. Foucault's later writings (1981) offered a softer view of power, positioned in capillaries or fluid relations, rather than 'belonging' to individuals. These pockets of power could potentially be exploited by anyone, allowing scope for resistance wherever there is power.

This interplay of structure and agency has been the subject of many debates, but later understandings veer towards a non-essentialist position. Butler (1997) incorporates both structure and agency, seeing the subject as an active but not

completely autonomous agent; Rose (1998: 189) conceptualises individuals as 'neither actors essentially possessed of agency, nor as passive products or puppets of cultural forces'. This thesis aligns with this middle-ground: individuals can negotiate their identities, and can challenge imposed ones, but at the same time are contained by discourse and structure.

Dis-Identification and Resisting Identities

Despite the symbolic systems of categorisation and discourse from external sources, such categories can be challenged on an individual or collective scale, and alternative identities forged (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Parsell, 2010). As Brubaker and Cooper argue: 'even the most powerful state does not monopolise the production and diffusion of identifications and categories; and those that it does produce may be contested' (2000: 16).

As Skeggs (1997: 123) writes, 'to dis-identify we need to know from what the dis-identifications are being made'. Individuals must consciously recognise an imposed social identity and have the agency and resources to challenge it. The capacity to resist is thought to be different for each individual, given that some people resist dominant conceptions while others do not (Skeggs 1997; Byrne, 2003). Being able to resist such conceptions and carve out a new mould from this, assumes an active subject capable of agency and 'innovatory action' (Byrne, 2003: 447) in contrast to the 'passive, dependent, over-socialised, non-individualised subject with little control over the direction and activity of her life' (Byrne, 2003: 459).

This model of identity poses a refreshing challenge to dominant stereotypes of homeless women, frequently portrayed as 'vulnerable', 'damaged', 'hopeless', and 'passive' (Stephen, 2000: 445). While not downplaying the structural forces that lead to homelessness, there is a need to highlight 'the importance of reflexive agency, control, resilience, and optimism' (Stephen, 2000: 445). Linked to this is Trzebiatowska's point (2013: 207): dominant discourses do not have to be seen or experienced as oppressive but serve as 'a resource for the construction of coherent narratives'. Alert to elements of dis-identification, resistance and denial of usual

frames of reference in participants' narratives, this thesis follows Stephen (2000: 445) in positioning women as 'active makers of their own histories despite apparently incontrovertible forces'.

It is necessary to keep in mind Skeggs' (1997) position on dis-identification and resistance in the lives of marginalised women, to avoid giving a naively optimistic account which does not reflect the realities of women's views of themselves. While acknowledging white working-class women's 'creative strategies' in constructing themselves, Skeggs (1997: 162) recognises the constrained context in which resistances occur: 'there are limitations on how they can *be*'. Skeggs (1997: 164) found numerous instances of resistance: 'refusal to be recognised meant a great deal of energy was spent displaying that they are not that which is expected', demonstrating that certain concepts have explanatory value for some individuals but not so much for others. This position recognises the importance of regulatory, dominant, moralising and stigmatising discourses on (homeless) women's lives but accepts that these may be negotiated and resisted to differing degrees by each individual.

2.7. Performing Identities

Goffman (1959) recognised identity-work not just as 'what's-going-on-in-our-heads' but how we present ourselves to others, or a 'presentation of self' (Goffman, 1959). Identity can be understood as not just something to 'think' about but as something *negotiated* through 'presentations'. On these terms, it is easier to see how identity is an inescapable aspect of everyday life.

Identity, for Goffman (1959), is implicated in elements of social interaction, carried out through 'impression management': how an individual adjusts their facial expressions, posture, or clothing in a given situation. Goffman (1959) notes that we either willingly 'give' or inadvertently 'give off' such impressions. Individuals are conceptualised as performers, actors, who attempt to project images of themselves to their audiences, as well as detecting images presented by others (Boydell *et al*, 2000). Goffman distinguished between felt identities (personal identities) and

social identities (those which others assign to the actor) but noted an overlap between the two. Scholars have pointed out that the meanings ascribed to an actor and those ascribed to the self may be notably different (Boydell *et al*, 2000).

The question of identity has also been a priority question for gender theorists since it is closely tied up with emancipatory politics and the concern to eliminate exploitation, inequality, and oppression. Much has been contributed by Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Although Butler's arguments focus primarily on sex and gender, her theses can also be applied to other axes of identity, such as class, and race; none of which can be singled out as a person's sole identity.

Butler (1990) argues that gender, like any other aspect of identity, is a performance, reinforced through repetition. Butler claims that the divide between masculinity and femininity is a social construction, derived from the binary divide between men and women, which is also false (Gauntlett, 2008: 145). It follows that no kind of identity is more 'true' or 'real' than any other; 'there can be no 'real' or 'authentic' male or female performance' (Gauntlett, 2008: 151). Here lies the potential for change – if gender, or any axes of identity, is a performance then it can consequently be performed as *anything*; it may be steered in a different direction through daily presentations. Butler recognised the limitations of this: gender performances are always discursive. Individual agency is always negotiated in relation to the categories created as ontological realities, as well as being limited by the weight of past performances and social interactions (Giddens, 1991).

That there can be potential to change these constraints of identity, many are positive about (Butler, 1990; Gauntlett, 2008). But as Green (2004: 47) argues: 'in terms of the acquisition of gender identity, Butler posits a more fluid and transgressive ideal than seems possible'. The crux of Butler's debate highlights the necessity of being aware of the instability and performative nature of identity categories and the potential to replace them.

2.8. Conceptualising Identity in the Lives of (Homeless) Women

Defining (Homeless) 'Woman'

The use of the term "woman" has led to accusations of essentialism within feminist theory, as it struggles to take account of difference. Certain strands of second-wave and cultural feminism have revolved around an ideology of a re-appropriated "womanhood" or female essence, so that all feminist demands can be grounded securely on the concept of the essential female (Alcoff, 1988). Here the emphasis is on celebrating rather than diminishing gender differences.

A significant challenge to the notion of 'true womanhood' or 'female essence' came from black feminists, who spoke out against the racist and ethnocentric assumptions of a white, middle-class feminism. hooks¹ (1984: 4) argues that 'race and class identity create differences in quality of life, social status, and lifestyle that take precedence over the common experience women share'. As Lather (1991) notes, to base feminism on the production of grand social theories (whether 'patriarchy' or the universal "woman"), glosses over other subjectivities – 'poor and working-class women, women of colour, lesbians, differently-abled women, fat women, older women' (Lather, 1991: 27).

The subject has come under attack by post-structuralists, who have 'deconstructed' it to the level of asserting that there is no such thing as an essential identity, or there is no 'essential core [which is] natural to us' (Alcoff, 1988: 415). The post-structural critique draws our attention to the construction of subjectivities and the interplay of social discourses, helping us to understand that individual subjects are also products of culture. However, to adopt the post-structural approach wholeheartedly poses significant challenges. In deconstructing the concept of "woman" as a cultural construct, it threatens to leave a vacuum.

Alcoff (1988: 419) appears unconvinced by the prospect of a post-structural politics: she argues that a negative feminism, only working to deconstruct gender

¹ bell hooks purposely spells her name without capitals to place greater emphasis on the text rather than the author.

and subjectivities, offers little hope for mobilisation. By de-gendering analysis, women's experiences become invisible again, in an ironic mirroring of a gender-blind classical liberal thought, which rendered questions of race, gender, and class irrelevant to issues of 'truth' and 'justice'. It would be difficult to make demands for women, Alcoff (1988) quite rightly argues, if "women" do not exist. Riley (1988) argues that an over-reliance on the category of "woman" is not sufficient enough to provide an ontological foundation for an inclusive feminism. She stresses that "women" is too volatile as a collectivity, in which female persons can be very differently positioned. Riley defends the post-structural position from critiques that remind us that there are real, concrete women, by claiming that "unmet needs" and "sufferings" do not just spring from a social reality of oppression, but also stem from the ways in which women are positioned, 'often harshly or stupidly, as 'women'' (Riley, 1988: 3). Riley (1988) insists that we need not be tormented by feeling that we have to take an either/or approach between post-structuralism and versions of cultural feminism.

Without doubt, the problem of the fragmentation of collective identities is one that affects any social justice movement, which launches itself on the appeal to solidarity, struggling for a common cause of an ignored or misrepresented group identity. The ontological assumptions and paradigms of cultural feminist theory have come under criticism for their over-simplistic and overly universal concept of "woman". Yet, to completely do away with the concept of "woman", after decades of campaigning seems redundant.

How then should feminism (and this thesis) conceptualise "woman", or 'specify the nature of gender' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 11)? Riley (1983: 8) expresses the desired challenge for feminism as: '... [Being] fully attentive to every effect of gender – and by means of that close attention, also to know where gender might end'. That is, we cannot erase the concepts of "woman" as post-structuralism might suggest; only by bearing them in mind, can we be aware of where they have been ignored or misread.

I would argue further that it is the qualities ascribed to femininity which are understood as the central carriers of the new middle-class individuality, building upon the long-established incitement to women to become producers of themselves as objects of the gaze. They are to look the part, sound the part and moreover, they can make themselves and their homes over to conform to this middle-class aesthetic (Walkerdine, 2003: 242).

...women and men are incited to become self-reflexive subjects, to be looked at and in that sense feminised and in charge of their own biography...*in which the feminine takes on a particular significance* [emphasis mine] (Walkerdine, 2003: 242).

In the neo-liberal project of individualisation, the subject is understood as a project to be worked on (a 'reflexive project of the self') and as having been freed from location, class, gender and other ties (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1994). Any (inevitable) failure in life is understood and explained, by the subject, through purely personal and psychological terms. Several feminist scholars have argued that these forms of regulation have more intense and specific outcomes for women (Walkerdine, 2003). As Walkerdine (2003) indicates in the first quote above, the very characteristics of the imagined individualised subject are those which women have long since been pushed to conform to: 'they are to look the part, sound the part and moreover, they can make themselves and their homes over to conform to this middle-class aesthetic' (Walkerdine, 2003: 242); to be critically or self-reflexively 'looked at' and judged by themselves and others. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) describe a movement away from 'living for others' towards 'a life of one's own' by women. Supposedly, women are further distanced from family ties, allowing the female biography to undergo an 'individualisation boost'. This is characterised by profound changes in a range of spheres, from education and work to sex and relationships, all of which have witnessed more freedoms and at the same time, more risk and individual responsibility.

Ironically, the very fact that the individualisation thesis seems to represent an aspect of the regulatory and disciplinary regimes which are increasingly positioning women as 'self-governing individuals' (McRobbie, 2004), gender and other social markers do in fact have a lingering significance in structuring the

opportunities and identities available to individuals. As McRobbie (2008: 7) argues, in the neoliberal landscape, anyone seen as peripheral to the individualised, autonomous, and ambitious woman is 'more emphatically condemned for their lack of status and other failings than would have been the case in the past'.

Skeggs (1997) highlights flaws in the individualisation thesis' application to marginalised women's lives. Her research concluded that women did not produce themselves in relation to individualistic narratives, but felt their lives were very public and social. Skeggs found that the 'reflexive project of the self' (Giddens, 1991) was not applicable to this group: they did not feel 'a possessive relationship to their subjectivity'; their reflexivity occurred through others (Skeggs, 1997: 163). Neither did they work on themselves and their identities only for themselves, but did it for others (Skeggs, 1997). Such insights led Skeggs (1997) to conclude that the individualisation thesis and its 'project of the self' are 'Western bourgeois' projects: 'they were produced from within the discourse of individualism, a discourse to which the women have only had limited access' (Skeggs, 1997: 163).

A key critique of individualisation theories is the limiting factors on the degree of agency an individual has when constructing their identity. Such constraints may be physical, material or social: 'although we may feel free to choose our identities, social and cultural factors, which include class and ethnicity as well as gender, contribute to the sorts of identities that we hold' (Woodward, 2000: 75). As Lawler (2008) writes, the individualisation thesis rests on the premise that such constraints are becoming less significant than they were in the past, whereas several commentators have responded that these categories continue to matter (Calhoun, 1997; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000).

Having outlined the various feminist critiques of the individualisation thesis in relation to women, it remains a task to consider how (or if) these are lived out and negotiated (or not) by the women in this study, in constructing and encountering their identities.

2.9. Conclusion: An Integrated Theoretical Approach to Identity

This theoretical framework provides a loose structure for making sense of the data, and 'illuminates what [I] am seeing in [my] research', drawing attention 'to particular events or phenomena' and shedding light on 'relationships that might otherwise go unnoticed or be misunderstood' (Maxwell, 1996: 33). Perhaps the search for a perfect theory of identity needs to be abandoned and instead a toolkit approach adopted, which draws on theories as and when they seem appropriate for the participant or context. While this theoretical framework consists of a patchwork of different accounts of identity, rather than just one 'grand theory', it has provided new insights around the phenomenon of identity, as well as Maxwell's (1996: 33) "'coat hooks" in the closet... provid[ing] places to "hang" data'.

First, this theoretical framework contends that identity is firmly grounded in a social context, a far cry from earlier modernist versions of the self, which emphasised individuality and detachment. This view requires a focus beyond the individual to understanding how external social factors influence their experience of self-identity. These include the impact of social relations, processes of reflection of others' appraisals, and others' validations in structuring one's perception of self-identity. Identity is formed between rather than within individuals, through networks of connections and social encounters (Lawler, 2008). Identity is as much about what a person deems they are not, as much as about what they say they are. This approach remains alert to individuals' accounts of social relations and interactions significant in forging their sense of self, as well as being attentive to participants' accounts of the perceived 'Other' in their positioning of themselves.

Second, identity is something individuals subjectively and actively experience and construct, rather than something innate. Following on from the positioning of the subject as an experiencing, reflective agent, this study draws on identity as a means to explore participants' subjective experiences of self. This recognises, quite optimistically, that dominant discourses (whether oppressive or not) pertaining to a specific social identity can be resisted, reappropriated and contested on an

individual or collective level: dis-identifications can be made (Skeggs, 1997; Byrne, 2003). This position simultaneously recognises the significance of constraints on women's lives, but at the same time acknowledges that these may be negotiated and resisted to a certain extent.

Third, taking insight from Butler (1990) and Goffman (1959), this theoretical framework argues that identity is negotiated and constructed through every day presentations and performances: identity is something that people *do* rather than something that people *have*. In this sense, identity is multiple, ever-changing and fluid depending on the specific social context at the time. Individuals might identify simultaneously as mothers, students, women and these identities might be played out (or felt) to a greater degree in different contexts. These understandings can be drawn upon to explore how participants perform identities, whilst bearing in mind how such performances might be limited or constrained by the situation (Butler, 1990).

Fourth, given that this study engages with women, this theoretical framework problematises the term, 'woman', as an identity marker to argue that 'woman' is a subject position situated within a network of economic, cultural, and political ideologies – rather than a deterministic set of attributes – with which the individual engages and has the potential to alter, challenge and negotiate. The term 'woman' is held onto as long as it is acknowledged that individuals have the agency to negotiate that position.

Not wishing to rely too heavily on this theoretical framework to the extent that it is imposed on the study, one later action consists of exploring how these identity discourses are lived (or not lived), empirically, for the women in this study, as well as being alert to other emerging discourses in the data not covered here.

3. 'Homeless' Women, Home and Identity: A Literature Review

3.1. Introduction

On becoming homeless, women are placed into restrictive categories which do justice neither for the homogeneity of the group nor for the shifting nature of identity. This chapter questions the very definitions and meanings of the terms 'home' and 'homelessness', and their problematic and complex relationship with identity, through a careful examination and critique of relevant literature. It explores and debates the assumed polarity between home and homelessness, finding a significant degree of slippage between the two, and raises challenges to the appropriateness of the term in application to those experiencing it. An exploration of the effects of homelessness on the self necessitates an investigation into the relationship between home, homelessness and identity and how this relationship is teased out in the literature.

3.2. Homelessness: Definitions and Approaches

Definitions are acts of drawing boundaries in order to determine whether or not someone or something is in or out of a particular category (Schiff, 2003: 496). According to Schiappa (2003), definitions and the process of defining induce social knowledge and function as social influence. The very definition of 'homelessness' is itself a site of struggle, reflecting varying desires and positions.

The ambiguous nature of the term 'homelessness' derives from the layers of meaning which different groups and societies have attached to it (Neale, 1997). Homelessness is a relative concept (Watson and Austerberry, 1986: 10), in that its meaning has changed over time (Abelson, 1999); it is understood differently in each society (Watson, 2000); and several discourses have worked simultaneously to construct the meaning of the term (Bauman, 1992).

This section takes as its starting point the definitions of homelessness used by policymakers, since these are arguably the most widely used, and the most influential. These definitions have considerable implications for understanding who homelessness affects and who it leaves out.

At its simplest, government legislation states that:

(1) A person is homeless if he [sic] has no accommodation available for his occupation, in the United Kingdom or elsewhere, which he –
a) is entitled to occupy by virtue of an interest in it or by virtue of an order of court,
b) has an express or implied licence to occupy, or
c) occupies as a residence by virtue of any enactment or rule of law giving him the right to remain in occupation or restricting the right of another person to recover possession.

(2) A person is also homeless if he has accommodation but –
a) he cannot secure entry to it, or
b) it consists of a moveable structure, vehicle or vessel designed or adapted for human habitation and there is no place where he is entitled or permitted both to place it and to reside in it.

(3) A person shall not be treated as having accommodation unless it is accommodation which it would be reasonable for him to continue to occupy.

(4) A person is threatened with homelessness if it is likely that he will become homeless within 28 days.

Housing Act (Great Britain, 1996)

The legal definition in England and Wales is broad in international standards, in that everybody without permanent housing is considered homeless, including those who are 'roofless' as well as those who cannot be 'reasonably expected' to live in their current accommodation. However, the definition is subsequently narrowed down through its interpretation by (and through the discretion of) government and local housing authorities – the distinction made between statutory and non-statutory homelessness, the criteria of 'priority need', and the application of intentional or unintentional homelessness means that an individual can be defined as 'homeless' but not entitled to housing assistance. In this sense, while the legal definition of homelessness is broad, the criteria for receiving help are comparably narrow.

Regardless of the definitions of homelessness set out in the Housing Act 1996, then, as Carlen (1994: 18) states, it is how 'local housing authorities, their agents

or delegates' interpret their duties that influences who receives support and accommodation. As such, the definition is open to gatekeeping practices by some local authorities to deny rights to the homeless (Cramer, 2005). Furthermore, as Dwyer *et al* argue,

Although legislation sets out legally enforceable rights to suitable accommodation for certain eligible, vulnerable, 'priority need' and 'unintentionally homeless' applicants, the accompanying official *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* (DCLG, 2006) and the discretionary powers embedded within it enable local authority practitioners to exercise considerable flexibility in how they judge individual applicants against such criteria (2014: 2).

Definitions of homelessness change with shifts in policy makers' perceptions of homelessness. The screening of *Cathy Come Home* in 1966 prompted the gradual recognition of homelessness as a housing rather than a social problem (Neale (1997). The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 reflected this change in perspective, namely that the answer to homelessness lay in a person's access to housing, and became the responsibility of housing departments.

Subsequently, the British government set up the distinction between 'statutory' and 'non-statutory' homelessness, which has existed in all future revisions of the 1977 Act (Johnsen *et al*, 2005). The term 'statutory homelessness' includes households defined as homeless by local authorities within the terms of the Housing Act 1996, the Homelessness Act 2002, and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002. To fall within this category, households or individuals must be eligible for assistance, 'unintentionally homeless', and have 'priority need' (Crisis, 2008). 'Non-statutory homelessness' applies to households who are not eligible or do not fall within the definition of priority need, such as single people or couples who have no dependent children and do not fall into the statutory definition of 'vulnerable'; families with older children who are no longer dependent. Homeless people who fall within this group have no right to emergency or more permanent accommodation, so are heavily reliant on support from voluntary and charitable organisations.

The term 'hidden homelessness' is not applied consistently but generally refers to households who do not show up on official records, because they may or may not have applied to local authorities for homeless status, or are not entitled to any accommodation according to government legislation (Crisis, 2008). People within this category may be living with friends or family members, 'sofa surfing', 'rough sleeping', or squatting.

Critiques of Government Policy Definitions

The concept of homelessness can be understood as a construct of dominant political, cultural and ideological forces as represented by the most powerful actors within UK society. The fundamental purpose of creating definitions is, Schiff argues (2003), to create a universally recognisable homeless person who can fit into funding and program definitions. The definition with the most weight will ultimately be dependent on the amount of authority-capital tied to it (Schiff, 2003). Policy definitions are powerful in a number of ways: they have the ability to control the field of homelessness; to shape what kind of services receive funding; to determine who receives support and alternatively, who is excluded. Stemming from these definitions are several discourses, which have come to dominate the debate about the causes of homelessness and the identities of those who come to experience it.

Fitzpatrick and Pleace highlight that from its very inception, the legitimacy of the homelessness legislation has been questioned, partly in terms of its 'operational deficiencies', in that multiple moves to and long stays in (sometimes low quality) temporary accommodation, while they await settled housing, is inadequate and disruptive for homeless families (2012: 237). However, the most important overall finding by Fitzpatrick and Pleace was that there appeared to be 'significant net improvements in the quality of life of homeless families after they had received assistance under this statutory system' (2012: 247).

Roche (2004) argues that the needs of the 'hidden homeless' are also often overlooked because they do not fit into the static definition of 'statutory

homelessness'. Single people, for instance, usually find themselves excluded from the statutory framework because they are generally not considered to be in 'priority need' (Fitzpatrick and Pleace, 2012). In this sense, current statutory homelessness definitions are unsatisfactory since they fail to reflect reality (Williams, 2001). While they serve a purpose as a means of allocating finite public resources, they are insufficient to the comprehension of the nature of homelessness.

Distinctions between Structural and Individual Explanations for Homelessness

Academic literature tends to distinguish definitions of homelessness which lean towards structural factors and those that point towards individual explanations (Johnson *et al*, 1991). The latter focus upon individual 'risk factors', which lead to an increased risk of homelessness (Clapham, 2003: 120). Neale (1997) identifies two types of approaches within this particular strand: the first considers individuals to be responsible for their homelessness and hence, guilty. The second maintains that people become homeless due to personal failure or inadequacy for which they cannot be held responsible. Structural explanations, on the other hand, point to factors such as housing and labour market trends, rising levels of poverty, or cuts in welfare benefits to explain homelessness.

Neale (1997) stresses that this dualistic approach to thinking about homelessness is simplistic and that no sharp distinction should be made between structure and agency. Such a dichotomy is not necessarily useful as a framework for thinking about homelessness and the complex factors associated with its causation. As a result, Neale (1997) further states that policy responses to homelessness grounded in one of these explanations will be inadequate. Accordingly, there is increasing interest from academics in developing other frameworks to better understand the complexity of homelessness.

The 'Homeless Pathways' Approach

A homeless pathway is defined as 'the route of an individual or household into homelessness, their experience of homelessness and their route out of

homelessness into secure housing' (Anderson and Tulloch, 2000: 11); or, as 'patterns of interaction (practices) concerning house and home, over time and space' (Clapham, 2003: 63). In both definitions, emphasis is placed on the dynamic movement of people throughout their experience of homelessness, on a temporal and spatial dimension. In other words, homelessness is reconceptualised from something static to a *process*.

The homeless pathways concept was first employed by Fitzpatrick (1999) in a study of young homeless people in Glasgow, as a move away from the static nature of existing research on homelessness, and substantially developed into an analytical framework by Clapham (2002). The strengths of the pathways approach has been emphasised by Clapham (2003) as allowing the voices and experiences of homeless participants to be heard, and as such, the dynamic nature of homelessness begins to be evidenced. It encompasses a wider definition of homelessness, by recognising the homeless population as dynamic, and homelessness as something people experience in different ways, and at different stages in their lives. Anderson (2001) cites the homeless pathways approach as the most useful for understanding homelessness. Her research applies discrete pathways in relation to key characteristics, such as gender, age, race, household type and life experience. This focus on homelessness as a process more closely mirrors the concept of gender (and other identity markers) as a process of becoming rather than a one-dimensional characteristic (Cramer, 2002). Similarly, there has been significant research to date which concentrates on one of these key dimensions whether focusing on women's homeless pathways (Golden, 1992), family homelessness (Styron *et al*, 2000), or young homeless people (Robinson, 2002b). Such research is valuable in asserting that 'homelessness' appears to follow different patterns in different groups, and that attempting to provide an all-encompassing definition of 'homelessness' is counter-productive.

While the pathways approach is a step in the right direction, studies relying on it often do not go further than offering descriptive biographies with little reference to wider literature or relation to structural factors (Clapham, 2003). There is a danger of work under the pathways approach simply falling within the individual

explanations literature, reinforcing the dichotomy between structure and agency explanations. Clapham (2003) posits that one way of overcoming this drawback is to incorporate an analysis of the impact of discourses and their relationships to the reality constructed by homeless people; in other words, examining not only the homeless person's perceptive worlds, but also considering this in relation to the discourses, which influence and shape them. Hence Clapham (2003) demonstrates how discourses of 'the family' frame expected behaviours between young people and their parents, and where these norms are breached, there is an increased risk of homelessness.

In an attempt to further the concept of the pathways approach, Pleace (2005) suggests 'the complexity thesis'. This argues for the disaggregation of homelessness into meaningful and verifiable groups of people with shared pathways into and through homelessness. This concept recognises that different groups of people who become homeless have distinct experiences of homelessness. Pleace (2005) appreciates the need to establish a working definition of the point at which people in each given subgroup should be regarded as 'homeless' rather than in a situation of housing need.

Feminist Critiques and Approaches

The specificity of homelessness is increasingly being explored in terms of gender, through a feminist perspective. Work within this field has levelled critiques at previous approaches and definitions of homelessness for their failure to adequately acknowledge gender differences within the homeless population, suggesting that services may not have been sufficiently developed to support the needs of women for instance.

As Watson (2000: 160) posits, dominant masculine discourses are 'demobilising to those who cannot recognise themselves within them'. Both statutory and academic discourses of homelessness are not fitting to *all* women, which according to Watson (2000), leads to a sense of passivity in homeless women to do anything about their situation.

Yet, feminist perspectives have not been without their share of theoretical challenges. For instance, categorising homeless women together as a homogenous group denies the diversity of women's experiences and assumes that specific characteristics are inherently 'male' or 'female'. This presents the danger of reinforcing dichotomies instead of challenging them. The current task of feminist definitions and approaches is to acknowledge the ways in which women are a heterogeneous population, in possession of agency, and not *completely* controlled by structural factors.

Postmodernism and Post-Structuralism

Postmodern and post-structural analyses go beyond an overarching definition of homelessness and focus on localised and specific sites of experience. Individuality, subjectivity, issues of difference and personal experience are emphasised above all else (Neale, 1997) and it is argued that there is no single solution to any social problem. This approach enhances the concepts elaborated on in the previous sections, which argue for focusing on specific subgroups of the homeless population. Instead of seeing each subgroup as a whole and defining homelessness according to that 'whole', post-structural positions argue for a plurality of meaning within each subgroup. For instance, the subgroup of homeless women consists of a diverse range of identities, and subjective experiences. Criticisms of this approach have asserted that this argument can be taken too far (Walby, 1992), and that definitions can be deconstructed to such a degree that they lose all meaning and potential for social change. It is important to combine postmodernist insights with ones recognising structural forces so as to retain an important practical effect.

Working Towards a Definition of Homelessness?

Whilst government definitions of homelessness are found lacking in terms of their narrowness, academics have challenged, and in turn, created more nuanced and theoretically-developed understandings of the term. Still, within academia, there is little consensus around how to define 'homelessness'.

But, as Neale (1997) suggests, the point is not to devise an all-encompassing theory of homelessness, but to highlight aspects of existing theories which may help to conceptualise people's experiences, understandings and pathways of homelessness. Defining homelessness is something that requires discussion with homeless people themselves as well as the balancing of viewpoints; or, as Glasser and Bridgman (1999) suggest, letting homeless people define *themselves* rather than imposing top-down definitions. This suggestion, as well as being a much-needed contribution to the literature, also adheres to a feminist standpoint perspective (further explored in Section 4.2) which pays heed to the knowledge of participants and attention to where empirical findings pose challenges to the literature and theory. As past studies have shown (Watson and Austerberry, 1986; Cramer, 2002) subjects may not necessarily identify with homelessness or with a particularly 'homeless' identity, however that may be defined, but contradict and subvert it. This study contributes to the wider critique of policy and academic understandings of homelessness to advance a more nuanced, empirically-informed and critical conceptualisation which takes into account perspectives of homeless women, an overlooked group.

3.3. Re-Conceptualising 'Home' and 'Homelessness'

Any understanding of homelessness needs to fully grasp and deconstruct the term around which it is structured: that of 'home'. In current models, the two terms are pitted against each other in dichotomy so that 'homelessness' assumes a lack of 'home': to define someone as 'home-less' is to define oneself as 'home-ful' (Harman, 1989: 25). Such ways of thinking do not account for the grey areas, the complexities, or the differences between and within groups – how a person defined statutorily as 'homeless' may feel more 'at home' in a hostel, or how someone living in a housing situation of domestic violence may feel 'homeless at home', for instance (Harman, 1989). This section attempts to unravel the complexity of home to further understand and problematise 'homelessness'.

'Home' as a Complex and Non-Neutral Space

Each home-place is itself... a complex product of the ever-shifting geography of social relations present and past (Massey, 1992: 15).

This section attempts to bring into question the elusive and complex nature of 'home', as hinted at by Massey (1992) above. It will do so by focusing on past and present theoretical debates around home as well as the relationship between home and homelessness, and exploring how normative meanings around 'home as refuge' can be deconstructed.

While the value of 'home' as a theoretical concept has been questioned (Lawrence, 1995) and disputed (Rapoport, 1995), the importance of further comprehending its meaning cannot be overstated. To echo Somerville (1989: 115), the home is important because it is the locale through which 'key kinship ties are reinforced'; it is also *seen* and constituted to be important by various social actors, from politicians to the mass media to the everyday public; idioms about home are ingrained in language and culture, so that home becomes 'both an imposed ideal and a potent cultural and individual ideal' (Kellett and Moore, 2003: 128). The deconstruction of home has taken place against a wider backdrop of geographical enquiry into the concept of 'place', which has argued for the understanding of places as 'products of the society in which we live' (Massey, 1995: 50), which can no longer be conceptualised as simply 'coherent, bounded and settled' (p. 54). What this means in terms of the 'place' of the home is that it can be expanded to mean much more than the bricks and mortar of the 'house', to a 'socio-spatial entity', a 'psycho-spatial entity' and an 'emotional warehouse' (Easthope, 2004: 134). As such, a space, when inscribed with (positive) meaning, can also be felt as a 'home', and vice versa. Home cannot be regarded as a neutral space; its doors have been opened to highly differentiated meanings.

The (Not So) Ideal Home

The contemporary British representation of the 'ideal home' is summed up by Blunt and Dowling (2006) as a detached, owner-occupied suburban house containing heterosexual, middle-class, white nuclear families. In a society that

privileges home-ownership (Gurney, 1997), the state and the media stigmatise those who do not fit into normalised categories. McDowell (2006) showed how media and government discourse vilified working-class people and normalised the middle-classes. Such strategies clearly seep into lives and home-making practices, affecting how home is experienced.

An ideal home is conceptualised as a paradise (Somerville, 1992), and a private space where one can relax and 'be oneself' away from the gaze of others (Saunders, 1989). Yet this ideal of privacy has been contested from a feminist angle. McDowell (1983) posits that ideals of family and privacy work in conflict, emphasising a form of 'togetherness, intimacy, and interest in each other's business' (Johnston and Valentine, 1995). A consequence of prioritising the ideal of privacy is its implications for domestic violence, as the home has been seen as a private realm where the state should not intervene (Malos and Hague, 1997).

Subsequently, feminist critiques have unpacked the normative ideal of home by arguing that it embodies patriarchal values of heterosexuality, and the white middle-class nuclear family. What for some might be an ideal home may be a prison (Wardhaugh, 1999), a place of violence (Tomas and Dittmar, 1995), and a site of intrusion and violation (Johnston and Valentine, 1995) for potentially excluded others. Much of the literature focuses on women as such excluded others (Tomas and Dittmar, 1995; Wardhaugh, 1999) asserting that the experiences of home are different for men and women (Somerville, 1989; Gurney, 1997). This has included studies on how homeless women have come to represent the 'unaccommodated woman' (Wardhaugh, 1999) because the street is seen as a risky, male space unlike the security, order, and femaleness of the home; as well as studies which have examined the meaning of home for homeless women revealing that many of them became homeless due to violence and repression within their 'home' (Peled and Muzicant, 2008). Peled and Muzicant (2008) argue that home as a place of domesticity and family life reinforces expectations of women to raise a family and maintain a perfect home, distinct from the outside, masculine world. These studies are vital in emphasising the specificity in domestic life and offer a

contrast to theoretical and empirical literature, which presents the domestic home as a positive ideal.

Feminist Histories of Home

The gendering of home stems back to the mid-20th century, a period when women in the West were primarily associated with the domestic realm (Morley, 2000). Although there have been changes in gendered household roles to an extent, women are still considered to be largely associated with the home (Massey, 1992). The gender division within the family or household has not been significantly altered in the UK, with women still primarily responsible for looking after the children and doing unpaid care work within the family (Boje and Leira, 2000). Morley (2000) contends that at a simple, material level, women, in the UK, are still much more subsumed in the home than are men.

One important impetus for developments in research around women and the home was the work of Saunders (1990), who argued that men and women experience home in essentially the same way: as a haven for loving relationships. Saunders' research was significant for the response it inspired. Saunders (1990: 308-309) suggested that 'the orthodox feminist image of the home as an oppressive institution simply does not square with what women themselves say about it...' This conclusion was deemed unreliable on methodological grounds by Gurney (1997) and his work was also critiqued for adhering to malestream positivism (Gurney, 1997: 382), resulting in women's voices being absent from the study. As Gurney states, assertions for a lack of evidence supporting the view that home is an oppressive place for women reveals more about the limitations of malestream positivism than feminist scholarship *per se*. Consequently, several studies (Somerville, 1992; Neale, 1997) emerging from the fields of urban sociology and housing studies have rejected Saunders' conclusions on methodological and theoretical grounds and have sought to place women's voices back into accounts of home. One such study found that gender was an important factor accounting for the ways in which men and women felt about and explained home, with women expressing much more complex accounts of meaning when compared with male

respondents (Gurney, 1997). For instance, housework was simultaneously referred to as a source of pride as well as a source of much resentment and boredom.

Many feminist theorists have expressed how home can be experienced as a place of fear and entrapment for women (Oakley, 1976; Wilson, 1977; Segal, 1983; Young, 2002). The feminist critique of home posits the opposite to Saunders (1990): women do feel the home differently to men and in a mostly negative way. Landmark works within this strand of feminist scholarship include Ann Oakley's (1976) *Housewife* and works by Lynn Segal (1983) and Elizabeth Wilson (1977), which address questions of oppression, exploitation and violence within the realms of the family home. The modern feminist movement has (de)constructed the home as an oppressive space rather than a nostalgic 'house as haven'; although, more recent strands of feminism have taken issue with these earlier feminist conceptualisations, placing emphasis instead on specificity of experience. In such a sense, despite the oppression and privileges surrounding the concept of home, it may also carry 'liberating potential' (Young, 2002). As Di Leonardo asserts:

...the domestic domain is not only an arena in which much unpaid labour must be undertaken, but also a realm in which one may attempt to gain human satisfactions – and power – not available in the labour market (1987: 451).

hooks (1990) remarks how the 'home-place' has been a site of resistance for African-American women; a refuge from dominating and exploiting social structures. Whilst acknowledging that the home can be an unsafe space for women, there is a danger in essentialising 'women' as homogenous, powerless, unthinking, and unquestioning victims denied of agency. Some women who take pride and satisfaction in the home, and women who enjoy their work in the home, may feel equally excluded by this contention. Understanding the gendered nature of home is a complex task, one which should avoid maintaining dichotomous modes of thinking.

While it may seem that feminist scholarship is at a theoretical stand-still with women's concepts of home, Young (2002: 314) stresses how home matters for

feminists and refuses to 'toss the idea of home out of the larder of feminist values'. While feminist scholarship has started to recognise how the home can be a positive space for *some* women, it remains vital to criticise a society that is unable or unwilling to extend those positive values to everyone. In response to the breakdown of the traditional idea of home and gender relations, Haraway suggests that the home has to be redefined to take into consideration the following societal and technological developments:

Home: women-headed households, serial monogamy, flight of men, old women alone, paid homework, re-emergence of home sweat shops, home-based businesses and telecommuting, electronic cottage, urban homelessness, migration, module architecture, reinforced (simulated) nuclear family, intense domestic violence (1985: 194).

Following on from Haraway's theorising, the current task for feminism is to formulate more adequate meanings of home, given changing circumstances in contemporary life. Despite a steadily declining number of households that account for the traditional nuclear family in the countries of the West, the 'politics of normalcy still operate so as to privilege the image of the traditional nuclear family as the hegemonic and preferable form of familial configuration' (Carter, 1995: 188), a trend most evident in the policies and rhetoric of the current Coalition government with welfare cuts disproportionately affecting women, especially women-headed households (Fawcett Society, 2012).

It is necessary to highlight how women may resist conventional meanings of home instead of simply positioning women as victims. As Neale (1997: 52) posits: 'individuals are thinking actors, capable of affecting changes...' Important here is the interaction between structure and agency. Women's lives are structured by public factors, but this does not deny their agency; neither does having agency mean that people are 'guilty or blameworthy if they meet with unfortunate circumstances such as homelessness' (Neale, 1997: 52). This section has shown that while the notion of home is different between men and women as well as within groups, as long as it continues to operate as a site of exclusion for *some* women, it still matters as a subject for debate. The next section looks at literature

on those women who do not see home positively, those who are 'homeless at home'.

'Homelessness at Home'

Legal definitions of homelessness in England and Wales currently acknowledge that, notwithstanding that a person may be in some form of accommodation, they may still be categorised as homeless if that accommodation is deemed as unreasonable to live in. Local authorities, then, may recognise and apply the construct of 'homelessness at home' in a technical sense. There is growing consensus that homelessness does not simply affect those who apply for homelessness assistance and people sleeping out in the open. Homelessness can be extended to those living in temporary or inadequate accommodation, or living in situations of domestic violence. Bennett (2011) maintains that within this particular sub-category of homelessness, groups such as women and young people are the most common, since they are more likely to pursue informal strategies to secure a roof over their heads – whether this involves staying with friends or 'attaching themselves to housed men' (Bennett, 2011: 962).

Bennett (2011) *extends* 'homelessness at home' to the more affective and imaginative geographies of home (Young, 1997), through memories and/or the presence of meaningful others – one may *feel* homeless in the home. In Bennett's (2011) study, which focuses on 'homelessness at home' in East Durham, many of the women felt under surveillance by their local authority and private landlords, undermining their sense of privacy and leaving them feeling homeless much of the time. One may feel homeless at home if struggling to pay the bills, being visited by debt collectors (Robinson, 2002), when living in a situation of domestic violence and abuse (Malos and Hague, 1997), or as Johnston and Valentine (1993) suggest, when subject to the imposition of heterosexual norms. Research by Gurney (1997) highlights how the experience of bereavement in the home can drastically affect people's sense of home – for one female participant such an experience led to a bereavement *of* the home. For young people, the home can be experienced as a place of conflict and family disunity (Kurtz *et al*, 2000). A study by Peled and

Muzicant (2008) focusing on the meaning of home for runaway girls found that home did not act as a 'homely' refuge, providing protection from the outside world, but was experienced as a dangerous place, often inflicting injury. As a study by May (2000) with a group of highly mobile 'visibly' homeless men – as well as the above examples – demonstrates, a sense of homelessness can be traced further back from life on the streets, in this case, to the participant's earlier relationship with his family, particularly his father.

It is possible to feel a sense of (dis)placement, not belonging, or absence of home whilst living in (inadequate) accommodation. The next section looks at responses to 'homelessness at home', and asks if certain consequences can be framed in terms of resistance to particular norms.

Resisting 'Home' (and Gender) Norms in Public Space

In a homelessness context, definitions of 'home' are expanded and diversified. Sheehan (2010), in a study of long-term homeless persons' constructions of home, found that a public square was identified as home for many participants since 'at home' activities took place there – whether this was sharing meals with friends, recovering from a hospital stay, or hair braiding. When such a space became imbued with meaning, it was experienced as home. Johnsen *et al* (2008) found that living in public spaces allowed some 'homeless' people to feel safer, more socially connected, and more autonomous. This idea of autonomy and safety is picked up by Peled and Muzicant (2008), who note how some runaway girls in their study, spoke of occasionally feeling 'safer' in public, reasoning that it was easier to defend themselves in the street.

By occupying 'masculinist' public space, homeless women defy conventional social order and gender norms, which associate women with the domestic private realm, so that society comes to define them as deviant, non-feminine or 'un-homely'. This 'difference' and stigmatisation frequently provokes victimisation, fear, feelings of vulnerability and violent attacks (Huey and Berndt, 2008). As a means of resisting victimisation, survival strategies and gender performances were employed by the homeless women in Huey and Berndt's study: 'femininity simulacrum', a set of

behaviours socially defined as female, such as 'girlishness', 'flirtatiousness', and/or maternalism; 'masculinity simulacrum', a set of behaviours typically identified as masculine, such as 'toughness', fearlessness, and/or 'assertiveness'; 'genderlessness', attempts at hiding elements associated with a gender; and finally 'passing', an attempt by heterosexual females to present themselves as lesbian to male audiences.

Even within a potentially dangerous environment, such as the streets, homeless women may use the tools available to them to perform acts of resistance to their portrayals as 'homeless', and their associations with the domestic, private space. In this way, homeless women can live outside of conventional, mainstream experiences of 'home', as well as normative constructions of 'woman'. It is important to recognise these resistances in the Foucauldian (1984) sense, as taking place within spaces and acts of the everyday and daily life. De Certeau (1984: xiv) theorises such potential resistances as 'the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline''. Recognising these acts of resistance does not romanticise life on the streets or annul structural factors in relation to homelessness, but it recognises that homeless women possess a sense of personal agency, however limited and constrained their situations may be (Casey *et al*, 2008).

Discussion in this section has shown how normative conceptions of 'home' have developed as ultimately associated with happy (nuclear, heterosexual) family values taking place within a physical structure and that this has had implications for those who feel excluded if they do not fit with such conventions. The home is much more complicated than such constructions imply, and functions as a complex, fluid, socially-constructed, and contradictory term. As a review of the diverse body of literature on home has demonstrated, it is the porous nature of the concept which must be adhered to – expanding the home outwards, beyond its meaning as a bounded unit, towards the wider neighbourhood, the mobile world and the realm of imaginative geographies to redefine how such meanings alter over time and for different people. Meth's study (2003) on homelessness, space, and domestic violence argues that for female rough sleepers, domestic violence occurs outside of

where we would normally expect it to be (within the house) and takes place instead in a public space, either on the streets or in a temporary dwelling. In order to include this group of women within research on domestic violence, it is important to rethink the 'domestic' and 'the home' beyond the scope of simply a 'house'.

What has also emerged is a broadening of the term 'homeless', due to the complexity of the concept of 'home'. As definitions of homelessness are significantly shaped by what is socially and culturally accepted as appropriate housing and 'home', it is useful to see 'homelessness' as part of a 'home-to-homelessness continuum' (Watson and Austerberry, 1986). This continuum spans from extreme 'rooflessness' at one end to unacceptable forms of housing where one can feel 'home-less'² at the opposite end of the spectrum. Similarly, 'home' can be seen on a continuum of permanent housing with personal warmth, comfort and stability to a public space where 'at home' activities can take place.

Exploring the notions of home and homelessness is imperative for feminist scholarship, since women's historical, cultural and social associations with the home are different to men's. Women may find themselves located at different points on the home-to-homelessness continuum than males. While being homeless in public space is obviously difficult, exclusionary, and constraining for women, for some it is experienced as a safer place than their previous housed situations.

3.4. Homelessness and Identity

This section considers literature relating to homelessness and identity. Discussion firstly explores the concept of stigma, as it is widely assumed that homeless persons occupy a stigmatised social category (Phelan *et al*, 1997), maintained partly through popular representations (as explored subsequently). The next section takes issue with some academic literature on homelessness and identity to argue that it has unintentionally upheld a notion of the 'homeless identity'. The

² Throughout this thesis, I use the term 'home-less' (with a hyphen) to refer to where an individual feels a lack of a *sense* of home; and 'homeless' where one is officially and societally defined as such.

final section re-considers homelessness and identity drawing on broader frameworks of identity (from Chapter Two) to conclude that literature would be enriched by moving away from a fixed notion of a homeless (therefore stigmatised) identity towards a more nuanced and flexible version informed by women themselves as well as a more updated and inter-disciplinary conceptual framework.

Homelessness and Stigma

The term, 'stigma', was conceptualised by Erving Goffman (1963: 4) as 'an attribute that is deeply discrediting'. Goffman (1963: 11) wrote that the original meaning of the term derives from the Greek, used to refer to bodily signs, which exposed something 'out-of-the-ordinary' about the moral status of the person they belonged to. At the time of Goffman's text, the term referred to the 'disgrace itself' rather than bodily evidence of it (Goffman, 1963), and ultimately recognised how identity could be 'spoiled'. This text offers much in terms of how we see ourselves, how others see us, and how we navigate the social world or as Jenkins posits:

...it emphasises the demands that others make of us on the basis of our public image. As a consequence, trajectories that are anything but those we would choose can be thrust upon us (2008: 96).

Since Goffman (1963), more variability exists in the definition of stigma (Stafford and Scott, 1986), with some applying it in its most specific and literal sense ('a mark of disgrace') and others using it more broadly to refer to any aspect of stereotyping or social rejection. One example of a more contemporary definition is from Crocker *et al*:

...stigmatised individuals possess (or are believed to possess) some attribute, or characteristic, that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context (1998: 505).

Link and Phelan (2001) note that such variation in definition is a result of the wide array of circumstances to which the concept has been applied, and welcome a broadening of the term, so long as scholars make it clear what is meant by stigma when it is used. My interpretation leans towards Crocker *et al*'s (1998) definition,

as it takes into account that it is a person's social identity which is devalued in a particular context – their appearance to others in interaction – rather than assuming that stigma is something inherently *wrong* with an individual. Although an individual might belong to a stigmatised group, it cannot be assumed that he or she will accept that stigma, or that it will lead to a 'spoiled identity'. As Jacoby argues:

...stigma is not solely the outcome of societal devaluations of differentness: in order for stigma to exist, individuals possessing such differentness must also accept this devaluation (1994: 269).

Conversely, individuals do not necessarily have to directly experience discrimination (*enacted stigma*) to feel stigmatised. *Felt stigma* refers to the shame associated with being in a certain social group, and the fear of enacted stigma or discrimination (Jacoby, 1994).

The concept of stigma has been applied, in several studies, to various 'spoiled' groups whose status in society has become devalued, including homeless people. There is much within the literature to suggest that becoming homeless affects or spoils one's identity (Wardhaugh, 1999; Boydell *et al*, 2000; Casey *et al*, 2007; Rayburn and Guittar, 2013). As Rayburn and Guittar (2013: 160) suggest, 'although some...identities have become less stigmatised over time, being homeless has remained a negative, deviant identity'. According to Kusenbach (2009: 401), homelessness is stigmatised because of the idea that homes are deemed to be symbolically expressive of identity and social status in contemporary society. Living in an alternative home, such as a hostel, or lacking a home altogether, may be the source of social stigma.

Harter *et al* (2005: 322-323) focus on the discursive reproduction of invisibility and stigma among youth without homes to conclude that 'stigmatisation emerged as a process that both enables and constrains participants'. For some, drawing attention to homelessness through the labelling process made them visible and receptive to much needed help and services; on the other hand, participants felt

subjected to value-laden discourses which devalued, disgraced and shamed them, 'reproducing discourses of outsider and other' (Harter *et al*, 2005: 322-323).

Marginalised homeless individuals in general, and homeless women in particular, face a range of narrow discursive categories into which they are classified, many of which are stigmatising and inappropriate (Shantz, 2012). Literature (Massey, 1992; Bebon, 1996; Wardhaugh, 1999) suggests that homeless women face a particular type of stigma, relating specifically to their gender and the stereotypes associated with it. As Bebon puts it:

...homeless women, in particular, present an image that is perplexing and often totally dissociated from the common conception of life in a modern...nation... they remain outside of our understanding of how women are supposed to live, often causing a vague sense of discomfort due to our inability to define who or even what they are (1996: 6).

Women often experience homelessness late in life, or at least at a point when they have 'thoroughly learned about the normal and the stigmatised' (Bebon, 1996: 5). Bebon (1996: 6) later writes that 'the painfulness of sudden stigmatisation can come not only from the individual's confusion about her identity, but from her knowing too well what she has become'. Wardhaugh (1999: 91) uses the term 'the unaccommodated woman' to refer to 'the gender renegade who has rejected, or been rejected by, traditional family and domestic structures'. As women have long been associated with the home and activities within the home – looking after the children, domestic tasks, and other unpaid care work (Massey, 1992; Morley, 2000) – homeless women live outside of conventional and mainstream notions of 'home' as well as normative constructions of 'woman'. Consequently, experiences of stigma (as a result of home-lessness) may be of a distinct nature for homeless women, who are historically more subsumed in the home than are men.

Other works explore techniques and strategies of stigma-management. Snow and Anderson (1987: 1336) focused on processes of identity construction and avowal among homeless street people ('individuals at the bottom of the status systems'). They found three forms of identity-work among homeless participants: distancing, embracement and fictive storytelling. Much like Snow and Anderson's (1987)

'distancing' technique, Rayburn and Guittar (2013: 172) found that homeless individuals took the role of 'the other' to try to separate themselves from homelessness, and to 'put distance between their sense of self and the stereotypes of homelessness that they confront daily'. Lankenau (1999) focused on panhandlers (or street beggars), finding that they performed favourable presentations of self as a way of managing stigmatised identities. Kusenbach (2009) looked at stigma-management among mobile home residents, and found that they used different techniques to create boundaries: ignoring stigma, covering it up, making jokes about it, resisting it, rationalising it, trying to fit in as 'normal'. Huey and Berndt (2008) found that female rough sleepers employed a variety of gender performances to prevent victimisation on the streets, typically constructed as a masculine and dangerous environment.

While it is important to acknowledge the significant contribution of this body of literature on homelessness and stigma, there is no need to universalise it. One critique levelled at work on stigma is that it fails to give priority to the words and perceptions of the people in the study, and instead values 'scientific theories and research techniques' (Schneider, 1988). The result, according to Link and Phelan (2001: 365) is 'a misunderstanding of the experience of the people who are stigmatised and the perpetuation of unsubstantiated assumptions'.

People experiencing homelessness are often presented as passive victims of stigmatising discourse. There is an unquestioned assumption that to be homeless is to feel stigmatised, with a wealth of work focusing on managing or coping with stigma, and significantly less on how people resist or 'talk back to dominant categorizations' (Juhila, 2004: 261) defined as:

...acts which comment on and resist stigmatised identities related to culturally dominant categorizations and which have the function of presenting the difference between one's own self or a group and the dominant definition (Juhila, 2004: 263).

Few studies have used a strengths-based perspective to explore the myriad ways people cope with and reassert their agency over a difficult social environment and

a tarnished social identity. This perspective is especially important for a feminist approach, which strives to avoid reinforcing the construction of women as passive victims. As Kemp states:

...what is most useful is a dialectical stance that encompasses both the real challenges that women confront in everyday environments and the possibilities that are open to them even in difficult environmental circumstances (2001: 22).

Some challenges to the orthodoxy (that homeless individuals are stigmatised, so must feel stigmatised, and as a result, employ stigma-management strategies) are emerging. Drawing on research carried out with female homeless street sex workers, Reeve argued that participants rarely employed stigma management techniques, significantly concluding that 'women can engage in prostitution, they can be homeless, they can be drug addicts – they can belong to highly stigmatised and deviant populations – without displaying a deviant outlook, or finding ways of justifying it' (Reeve, 2013: 838). Likewise, McCarthy and Hagan (2005) found that homeless street youth rarely feared stigmatisation and societal rejection; and Block (2009), focusing on individuals managing HIV-related stigma, found that stigma-management was diverse across the group of participants: some individuals felt highly stigmatised, while others – despite experiencing discrimination – did not.

Representations of Homelessness

The reinforcement and maintenance of the stigmatised 'homeless' identity takes place through popular portrayals of homelessness and homeless people through media coverage (Widdowfield, 2001) and even marketing materials produced by homeless charities (Breeze and Dean, 2012). Buck *et al* (2004) point to the mid-1980s as the real starting point of the mass media's obsession with homelessness. While media has changed its type of coverage, moving steadily away from a 'blatant caricaturing' (Widdowfield, 2001: 51), it still promotes a particular image and understanding of homelessness and homeless people.

Literature in this area generally understands representation as 'the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping; not merely the transmitting of already-existing meaning, but the more active labour of *making things mean*' (Hall, 1997: 54 [emphasis mine]). The media is understood as an ideological device, accessed much more easily by the dominant classes, to communicate particular discourses, in particular ways, at the expense of alternative ones. In contrast, economically and socially disadvantaged groups, like homeless people, are excluded from the production of media, and are 'rarely afforded a voice regarding issues affecting their lives' (Hodgetts *et al*, 2005: 31). Silverstone (2006) identifies the media as a 'moral force' in society acting as a door to the world and presenting categories of difference, sameness, and otherness. Other scholars have hinted at the discernible effects of these types of portrayals, suggesting a filtering through of representations to public attitudes and imaginations. Blasi (1994: 565) posits that the general public will most likely draw on 'prototypes... of many imaged or real people' rather than statistics if asked to describe the characteristics of 'the homeless'. Power asserts that 'knowledge and insight on the lives of homeless people and poor people... is often derived from mediated experience, what we read in newspapers, what we hear on the radio, what we see on TV' (1999: 79). Champaign (1999) reports how media images denoting 'difference' infiltrate through to face-to-face interactions between the homeless and domiciled, influencing how the public react to 'street beggars'. Hodgetts *et al* (2006: 499) refer to this as [being like] 'ripples in a pool, on entering social dialogue fragments of these media representations take on a life of their own, moving out through society and into lifeworlds'. According to a number of scholars (Widdowfield, 2001; Hodgetts *et al*, 2005; Schneider, 2011), then, the media acts as an important and powerful mediator, influencing society's understandings of and responses to homelessness and homeless people, with little room for the voices of the very people it purports to describe.

In terms of *what* the media presents of homelessness, Widdowfield (2001) found a narrow array of images, tending to fall under three categories: homeless people as 'different' from the rest of society; homeless people as criminals engaging in fraudulent and violent activities; or as 'needy victims'. Hodgetts *et al* (2005) argue

that coverage is highly selective and complicit in maintaining oppositions between 'those' homeless people and 'us', the housed public. Hodgetts *et al* (2006) write of a tendency to characterise the homeless in terms of 'what they lack'. The dominance of the 'roofless' person in most public representations of homelessness is a characterisation so mainstream that it has come to be adopted by homeless charities in their marketing materials (Breeze and Dean, 2012). An earlier study by Harris (1991) focused on media images of homeless *women* to find predominant portrayals to revolve around: victim, exile, predator and rebel. Novac *et al* (1996) note how homeless women came to be subjectified in various different ways through the media, culminating in the ubiquity of the term 'shopping bag ladies' from the end of the 1980s onwards.

The contribution of this body of work has been to identify the media as a major obstacle to a 'clearer vision of homelessness' (Blasi, 1994) and a barrier to social justice, by operating to fix barriers between certain groups (Sibley, 1995). There is a broad, common suggestion of an imbalance of power (Couldry and Curran, 2002) at the expense of those experiencing homelessness, but also implying passivity on the side of the homeless as well as the audience of the media (who accept these images of homelessness with no questions asked). Similar to the early body of work on stigma (Goffman, 1963; Snow and Anderson, 1987), the bulk of work on representations of homelessness presents a one-dimensional, top-down view of media power and leaves little opportunity for resistance – both on the part of the audience in not accepting these images, and on the part of the homeless individuals in actively imagining themselves. Although these aforementioned studies offer a sound documentation of existing media representations, notably little has been done which explicitly involves the viewpoints of homeless people themselves on the subject of their representation (Hodgetts *et al*, 2006; Marsh, 2006; Breeze and Dean, 2012).

While it is useful to know how homelessness is portrayed and how it might be received, such studies also have the unintended consequence of further approaching homeless groups as victims of oppression and social inequality. This gap has been noted by Hodgetts *et al* (2006: 514) who call for a 'shift to 'cultures of

resistance' or the strategies through which groups... work to construct alternative meanings and ways of being'. As in the stigma literature, and the growing demand to move away from an assumed acquiescence to a stigmatised identity, there is a similar shift (albeit slowly-growing) in focus in this body of work to 'the active role of homeless participants in making sense of their own lives' (Hodgetts *et al*, 2006: 514). This shift would mirror the changing conceptualisations of power from the top-down model, to one in which power is understood on a more mundane, everyday level which ordinary individuals can exercise; and the proliferation of more 'democratic' media forms in recent years which allow more scope for grassroots groups to get their agendas across and for citizens to make their voices heard (Bakardjieva, 2012). Despite this call for more focus on resistance of media narratives, recent work in the field has continued to emphasise the complicity of the media in presenting overly simplistic images of homelessness, rendering invisible the diverse perspectives of those who experience it (Schneider *et al*, 2010; Calder *et al*, 2011; Zufferey, 2013).

Problematizing the 'Homeless Identity' in the Literature

Academic literature too has served to reinforce an un-problematized 'homeless identity' by demonstrating that people who are homeless do things that would be considered outside the norm, whether begging or going through rubbish (Parsell 2011; 2010). Placing emphasis on these 'out-of-the-ordinary' activities and identities is problematic for various reasons. First, such constructions are largely negative and place 'concentration on the disease aspects of the homeless, overlooking their assets' (Boydell *et al*, 2000: 28). This serves only to reify the homeless person as 'other', emphasising problematic differences, and in producing the very conditions of alienation that such studies purport to describe (Pascale, 2005). Second, the model leaves many questions unanswered: what factors influence how roles are constructed? What is the dynamic between these constructions and people's personal identities? (Seal, 2007: 4). Third, people without homes have very little option but to display what would normally be considered 'private' activities that would otherwise be concealed (such as public drinking) – this does not mean that they are inherently 'out-of-the-ordinary' but simply 'out-in-the-open' (Parsell, 2011). Parsell (2011), in fact, found that the

majority of his participants spent a large part of their time doing 'ordinary' things, and voiced 'unremarkable' worldviews and aspirations. Parsell also found that many people experiencing homelessness rejected the notion of being a 'homeless other' and described themselves with reference to their families. Later studies (Pascale, 2005; Seal, 2007; Parsell, 2011) have asked what purpose is served by this 'othering' of homeless people.

Parsell (2011) argues that uncritical construction of people with a 'homeless identity' runs the risk of considering their homelessness as an all-encompassing characteristic. Yet their identity is constructed for them - or 'foisted on them' (Seal, 2007: i) - to such an extent that they become 'objects of discourse' (Pascale, 2005: 261) rather than subjects of their own experience. Western society presents a particular set of messages, explicitly and implicitly, about the value of homeless people (Boydell *et al*, 2000), with images of and meanings associated with homelessness typically connoting a lack of shelter, privacy, retreat and warmth; images of criminality and anti-social behaviour; and vulnerability and victimhood (Butchinsky, 2007).

Whether these meanings derive from the media, the news, or literature about homelessness, they all share the tendency of categorising homeless people into various stereotypes and making assumptions about their lives (Seal, 2007). This act of misrecognition does matter significantly (Fraser, 1996). Following Goffman (1969), the sense of self is intimately connected to the social, to how we are seen by others and made to be seen by others. Identity is not just something claimed by the individual, but is also dependent on an individual's identity being recognised or accepted by a wider community of practice (Bell *et al*, 1994).

Thus, the messages presented by discursive practices about homelessness and homeless people will undoubtedly have discernible impacts on the development of self-concepts within the homeless population (Southard, 1997). Neither can it be assumed that homeless people are simply victims of these discursive practices. All individuals possess a sense of agency even when they seem totally powerless. The

'homeless identity' may be negotiated and contested by homeless people and others at the local, political, and personal level (Seal, 2007).

Negotiation and Contestation of the 'Homeless Identity'

Key to Giddens' (1991) theorising on identity is the 'reflexive project of the self' in late modernity. As such, expressions of identities, narratives and life stories lie somewhere between the production and reproduction of social life by the people that are part of it. However, this emphasis on constructing individualised identities, and the increased personal responsibility that accompanies it, runs alongside increasing structural instability and material disadvantage (Farrugia, 2011) as well as popular constructions of homelessness that construct 'the homeless' in a limited number of ways. Studies have noted that people experiencing homelessness are well aware of such constructions (Hodgetts *et al*, 2005). Giddens' (1991) merging of macro and micro forces in shaping identities is useful in understanding how people experiencing homelessness may be aware of the structures, institutions and dominant discourses that they must negotiate. In other words, in shaping their identities, homeless people come to terms with the meanings of homelessness as stigmatised difference. Thus, homeless people may partly draw on the same discourses, which define homelessness as 'other', or as moral failing, to construct their own subjectivities.

Much of the literature on homelessness and identity draws insights from Goffman (1959). For the most part, this literature discusses how homeless individuals create and assert identities that are congruent with internal self-identities and social identities. Some argue that homelessness means a loss of social identity – loss of permanent address, work, school, relationships, and a place to call one's own – and go as far as to say homelessness can mean a loss of a sense of self (Boydell *et al*, 2000). An understanding of Goffman (1959) informs us of the constant renegotiation and re-presentation of different social roles and behaviours depending on the social context and interaction. Just like any other attribute of identity, 'homelessness' should not be taken to mean a constant defining attribute. At different times of the day, in different contexts, with different people,

individuals might align more with any other attribute: whether that is their gender, their sexuality, their role as a mother or a father. Snow and Anderson (1987) show how the 'homeless identity' may be overcome by exploiting surface appearances and interactions to 'present' different identities. This is outlined in their 'distancing' model; the only problem being it does not recognise the social constructed-ness of the 'homeless identity', or as Gauntlett (2008: 114) writes, 'it is very difficult to see what might lie behind all of the displays of self'. Instead, it can be argued that conceptualising the 'homeless identity' as some singular, fixed starting point of identity from which to deviate from, is over-simplistic.

While different 'presentations of self' is something everyone engages in, Brekhus (2003) affirms that the more marked or stigmatised an identity attribute, the more difficult it is for the one who carries it to present as if it is just one aspect of their life and self, or in other words, to move away from these *schedules*. The more unique the attribute in relation to the general population, the higher explanatory value it is given in conveying that identity (Parsell, 2011). Therefore, while individuals experiencing homelessness engage in other 'presentations of self', the very fact of their homelessness – and how this is made to mean something 'other' by society – means that these negotiations are constrained. No matter how multiple and fluid their identities may be, it is their 'homeless' attribute which is seen as the ultimate 'self' by others, and may therefore be more difficult to resist for homeless individuals themselves.

Preceding discussion is further complicated by Butler (1990) and other contributors to queer theory. Both Butler and Goffman conceptualise social behaviour as a performance enacted for an audience. Where they differ is perhaps where they place their emphasis – Butler concentrates on the unstable nature of gender, allowing us to 'understand gender play as dynamic processes delimited by discourses' (Huey and Berndt, 2008: 183), whereas Goffman provides the tools for allowing us to explore the details of these performances, the symbolic meanings of certain mannerisms, costumes and so on. Butler reminds us that every aspect of identity is a performance, which is reinforced through repetition of discourses about it. In terms of gender, Butler asserts that we do not have a gender identity

which informs our behaviour, but rather that our behaviour is all that identity is. Thus it follows, there is no 'homeless identity' which informs behaviour; on the contrary, that behaviour is all the 'homeless identity' is. Butler (1990), as well as Parsell (2010), would both agree that a 'homeless identity' is not something derived from within but the performance of a set of behaviours externally imposed. Taking this to its conclusion, Huey and Berndt (2008) argue that Butler's account of performativity allows room for individual agency, but an agency that is always negotiated in relation to the categories created as ontological realities – whether gender, 'race', class, sexuality and so on.

Literature on homelessness and identity only touches upon Butler's work. Huey and Berndt's (2008) paper, *'You've gotta learn how to play the game': homeless women's use of gender performance as a tool for preventing victimization*, is the only work to place these concepts at the centre of its thesis. They move the emphasis away from fixed identity categories to the potential for exploiting these unstable categories (in this case, gender) as means of performances and tools for resistance. An overemphasis of the 'homeless identity' has subsumed other identities, particularly gender, 'within the category of the "undifferentiated he"' (Lofland, 1975: 45). This logically takes us to the idea that identities are fluid intersections of multiple axes of differentiation (Brah and Phoenix, 2004: 76). If we consider the intersections of 'race' and gender with homelessness, the picture becomes more complex and dynamic. More recent scholarship has begun to look at how gender structures homeless people's lives (Wardhaugh, 1999; Casey *et al*, 2007; Huey and Berndt, 2008). The 'homeless identity' is complicated once you begin to understand it in terms of an intersection of differentiated identity categories - gender, 'race', class and so on. Neither is a person's identity stabilised or essentialised by these ontological identity categories (Butler, 1990) since ways of existing in the world can shift depending on social relations (Goffman, 1959), societal structures, institutions and discourses (Butler, 1990; Giddens, 1991), historical experiences, and material conditions.

It is now asserted and recognised, across an array of disciplines, that all identities are fluid amalgams, never singular, and never simply situated on just one axis of

difference. Rather, as scholars have argued (Brah and Phoenix, 2004) we need to be alert to the intersection of lines of difference and the fluctuating investment that different individuals have in different subject positions. From this line of thought, it is clear that homelessness ought not to be taken to mean the principal or only way a person experiencing it should be identified. Progress from a bulk of literature about homelessness, which is fixated on the 'homeless identity', requires further elaborating on in terms of other axes of identity (and the ways that these are performed, parodied, resisted, and turned on their heads) that contribute to how homeless people see themselves. Only by further elaborating and exploring the diversity of homelessness is there a chance of overcoming current forms of misrecognition. Research in this field would be enriched by seeking to understand how homeless women position themselves and negotiate their identities as homeless, women, *and many other things*, against sets of social narratives which try to do the defining for them.

3.5. Conclusion

Through a review of relevant literature this chapter has considered, critiqued and problematised the three concepts central to this thesis: home, homelessness and identity. Common across all three strands is a clear shift in how they have been conceptualised over time: although all concepts remain characterised by competing approaches and perspectives, all three have tended towards more fluid and nuanced understandings moving away from fixed, permanent and universal ones.

It became apparent, after reviewing literature around home, homelessness and identity that little attention has been paid to gender and women's experiences. Normative accounts of home and homelessness have been skewed towards universalist and androcentric perspectives. Although feminist and other accounts are increasingly attempting to redress this silence, there still remains much work to be done to bring women's voices back from the margins and into the centre of debates around home, homelessness and identity.

This study progresses literature across these fields by taking all three concepts into consideration and addressing gaps across all three strands: problematising 'homelessness' as a top-down label and definition and instead incorporating homeless women's perspectives into the meaning; integrating a nuanced understanding of home into an understanding of homelessness; and challenging earlier models of homelessness as a stigmatised identity and recognising the interplay of agency and resistance on the part of the women placed into this category.

4. Knowing, Doing and Being: Researching Homeless Women's Identities from a Feminist Perspective

4.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the processes behind the findings: the *hows* behind the *what* was found. In order to provide an honest and accessible picture of my research, this chapter outlines the epistemology from which the study was conducted; the feminist methodological approach taken; my positionality vis-à-vis the study and participants; the choices behind the methods employed, how they were applied, and how well they worked; and considers other elements of the research process such as the participant 'sample', access, recruitment and the analytical process.

This study is rooted in a feminist approach, informing the work methodologically, epistemologically and ethically. Fonow and Cook (1991) write that a feminist approach allows women to become knowledgeable and knowable on their own terms; it was vital to approach this topic with the same commitments – important given that [homeless] women are a marginalised group (in policy, society, and academia).

Before outlining the methodological approach, it is necessary to reflect upon how (and why) this changed. Initially, the intention was to focus on the representation of homeless women in media portrayals, and how such portrayals were negotiated by women experiencing homelessness. After several dilemmas arose concerning methodology, ethics, and feminist commitments, the focus was altered to homeless women's self-representations and negotiations of identity. It was decided that if media portrayals did play a significant part in homeless women's identity-work then this would be pursued. Given the commitment of feminist research to be ethically rigorous, inclusive and participatory, it would have been contradictory to assume that media plays *the* central role in homeless women's expression of identity at the outset.

4.2. Feminist Epistemologies

Epistemological debates *matter* in feminist theory since such decisions affect what can be known and what gets to count as knowledge (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). The development of epistemology and methodology within contemporary feminist theory has been influenced by its critique of 'common sense' western thought that presumed knowledge of reality rested on factual evidence which could be observed, independent of the researcher's values and bias (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002).

Alternative Feminist Epistemologies

Feminism seeks to articulate women's experience in order to correct an androcentric epistemology of positivist and modernist western thought. Feminist epistemologies raised issues such as the responsibility of knowers and the power relationships implicit between researcher and researched (Longino, 2010). The *situatedness* of the knower (and the known) has become a key theme (Longino, 2010) and this awareness has highlighted that we only ever produce partial knowledge (Skeggs, 1994).

Three models dominate the core of writing on feminist epistemologies: feminist empiricism; feminist standpoint theory; and feminist postmodernism (Hawkesworth, 1989). Ensuing discussion outlines, compares, and critically assesses each of these positions.

Feminist Empiricism

Consistent with Harding's (1986) initial definition, feminist empiricism '...argues that sexism and androcentrism are social biases correctable by stricter adherence to the existing methodological norms of scientific inquiry' (Harding, 1986: 24). According to Harding, feminist empiricism implies that the obstacle to objectivity is bad scientific method, not scientific method *per se*. Following this logic, increasing the number of female scientists practising science (or research) both *more rigorously and carefully* would help to eliminate biases, because 'women as a

group are more likely to produce unbiased and objective results than are men' (Harding, 1986: 25). If the methods of science are not identified as being masculinist then they can be used to correct the errors produced by 'male bias' (Longino, 1993).

In this tradition, the ideal knower is still the 'purified mind', which contains traces of conceptualisations of 'truth' feminists have critiqued (Longino 1993). Feminist empiricism calls for greater (albeit stricter) use of the very scientific methods, which excluded women in the first place (Longino, 1993). Harding (1993: 53) later coins this approach, 'conservatism', arguing that its weakness lies in its refusal to address the limitations of dominant conceptions of scientific method, and the ways that this might distort research and its results, even if the most rigorous checks are in place. In such a strong version of feminist empiricism, the weakness lies in its failure to acknowledge that science itself is a theory-laden convention. Even if more women could practice science in more rigorous ways, it still could not produce objective, 'unmediated' knowledge, since scientific and philosophical conventions are theoretically mediated discourses.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Standpoint theory emerged out of Marxian insights on the privileged knowledge of the oppressed; known as the 'standpoint of the proletariat' (Harding, 1993: 53), and adapted versions were later introduced by feminist theorists (Smith, 1974; Hartsock, 1983; Harding, 1986; Hill Collins, 1991). Hill Collins (1991) insists that standpoints emerge from how groups are positioned in relation to structures of inequality and difference; experiences of oppression and experiences arising out of these power structures, produce a standpoint that offers a 'superior vantage point of knowing' (Skeggs, 2001: 432). Intemann (2010: 782) identifies two main theses constituent of feminist standpoint theories: the situated-knowledge thesis; and the thesis of epistemic advantage. The former assumes that social location influences our experiences, shapes what we know, claiming that knowledge is achieved from a particular standpoint. The latter asserts that some standpoints – specifically the

standpoint of the marginalised – are epistemologically advantageous in some contexts.

There are similarities between feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint theory in that they both strive for achieving scientific objectivity [of women's experiences]. Stanley and Wise (1983) see feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint as grounded in Cartesian assumptions that a single social reality exists 'out there', which particular persons have a greater degree of access to. The difference lies in how this objectivity is reached, and who it is reached by (for feminist empiricists it is trained female scientists; for feminist standpoint theorists it is the oppressed).

The epistemological question, then, becomes not how, but *if* we wish to claim that we can ascertain a 'female experience' (Alcoff, 1988: 424). Despite its problems, it is possible to see the advantages that standpoint theory offers. First, it makes clear that positionality must be considered influential to what and how we decide to study; there is no such thing as the 'disinterested knower' (Skeggs, 1997: 26). Second, acknowledgement of such perspectives and positionality leads to a more 'integrated, connected [*and a more responsible*] knowledge [*or knowledges*]' (Millen, 1997: 7.2) Third, standpoint theories offer a way of knowing the personal, private, and subjective aspects of women's lives, previously considered not worth knowing by the masculinist objective stance (Allen, 2011).

One of the main critiques levelled at feminist standpoint theory is its inability to take account of difference, leading Lemert (1992) to accuse the position of being 'essentialist'. Lazreg (1994) argues that the essentialist thinking inherent in standpoint theory comes from its tendency to conceive of women's experience as providing women (because they are women) with a privileged position in the pursuit of truth. The problem, Lazreg believes, is that if we are to keep calling upon women's experience as a foundation of knowledge, it does nothing to uphold the argument that 'woman' is in fact a social construction; instead, it assumes a female 'nature' that women's experience reveals. It does not recognise that women's experience has no privileged or immutable nature (Lazreg, 1994); that it is historically specific and susceptible to change. Taken to its conclusion, as Allen

(2011) fears, it simply replaces male supremacy with female supremacy. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) recognise the problem of claiming epistemological privilege in virtue of being oppressed. Standpoint theory assumes the oppressed have a privileged relation and access to the nature of oppression and a reality that is 'out there'. As well as being problematic in assuming that experiential knowledge has a direct connection to reality, it also assumes that people have automatic epistemic privilege because they are oppressed. Intemann (2010) finds flaws in these arguments, because they do not account for people internalising their own oppression and perhaps having a less accurate view of their world; it assumes that everyone has fair access to educational resources to interpret or realise their oppression; and it does not highlight how knowledge from one's social position might not be relevant to some areas of knowledge.

More contemporary standpoint theorists have clarified earlier versions to distance them from problematic interpretations (Crasnow, 2006). Recognising its flaws does not mean abandoning it altogether. Maynard and Purvis (1994) recognise that one of the earliest means of challenging the silencing of women in modernist malestream thought was by encouraging women to speak about their own conditions and experiences.

It should be noted that many of the critiques of standpoint theory have been deemed unfounded (Hill Collins, 1991; Smith, 1997), due to misunderstanding, misrepresentation and distortion. Smith (1997) insists that standpoint theory does not assume women's standpoint is rooted in any kind of reality, or that we can have unproblematic access to such a reality. Instead, Smith (1997: 393) describes 'reality' as '...where discourse happens and does its constituting of "reality"'. The charge that standpoint theories are universalising is countered by Hill Collins (1991: 377), who recognises that while standpoint theory 'argues that groups who share common placement in hierarchical power relations also share common experiences in such power relations', it does not mean that all individuals within that particular group have *exactly* the same experiences.

Standpoints need not be seen as biologically or socially deterministic. It is beneficial to recognise that positionality influences our knowledge-production, but we are not determined by these locations (Skeggs, 1997). We can emphasise a standpoint not rooted in biology but as Lauretis (1984: 182) suggests, '...that complex of habits, dispositions, associations and perceptions, which en-genders one as female'. This does not assume a 'woman' determined by biology, but a subjectivity that emerges from '...the continuous engagement...in social reality' (Lauretis, 1984: 182). Skeggs (1997) emphasises the fluidity of standpoints. If standpoints are fluid this means that women come to *occupy* standpoints rather than being born with them, so can move to other positions. There is no such thing as a wholly 'female' experience since there is no such thing as a unitary, unambiguous 'woman'.

A revised standpoint theory must problematise the nature of the relationship between ideas, experience, and social 'reality'. We can expect to come to a limited and situated knowledge of different interpretations. Instead of seeing this as a necessarily objective failure, we should see it as one that is successful in achieving more vigilant, responsible, and critical *knowledges*.

Feminist Postmodernist Epistemology

A feminist postmodernist epistemology (Weedon, 1987; Lather, 1991) takes a critical stance towards the essentialism and foundationalism with which feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint theories have been charged. Feminist postmodernism rejects the notion of *a* truth about reality, as well as the possibility of being able to uncover it through scientific method. It attempts to understand and reconstitute 'the self, gender, knowledge, social relations, and culture without resorting to linear, teleological, hierarchical, holistic, or binary ways of thinking and being' (Flax, 1990: 39).

Maynard and Purvis (1994) argue that the feminist postmodern perspective sees the social world as so fragmented and individualistic that to conduct research to challenge any structure is difficult. Such a relativist position renders theory-

building impossible (Allen, 2011). A number of feminist concerns, whether homelessness, rape, domestic violence, or sexual harassment are issues which must be recognised as 'true' if we are to change them; we cannot afford to slide into a relativist resignation. As McLennan (1995) recognises, without *some* degree of epistemic grounding and some notion of the knowing subject, political projects could not be sustained.

Conclusion

While combining insights from different feminist epistemologies appears contradictory, it may enhance the overall position in showing a diversity of thinking. The critical point of feminist epistemology is its starting point; to present a vehicle through which women can find their own voices, after having, for the most part, remained philosophically mute (Crary, 2001). There are a number of components that seem necessary to a feminist epistemology for this thesis.

Firstly, 'knowledge', or what counts as knowledge, comes from someone and somewhere. In line with Stanley and Wise (1983: 193), there is 'an experiencing, feeling subject at the centre of all intellectual endeavour[s]'. This proposition dispels the myth of 'the voice from nowhere', and argues that each 'knower' is historically and socially constituted, and this shapes the specific knowledge claims produced. Feminist voices profoundly challenged the positivist status quo: 'that "good research" requires impartiality and "scientific" objectivity' (England, 2006: 287). One of the most significant contributions from feminism, then, is that research is never value-free and there is no one absolute 'truth' (Haraway, 1991).

Secondly, the 'knowing' subject has been de-essentialised. Postmodernist thought (Butler, 1990) has highlighted the difficulty in establishing a concrete subject (for instance, 'woman') since they are historically and socially variable. While it is essential that we recognise how particular standpoints influence our knowledge claims, it is also important to emphasise how standpoints are not fixed or determined, but something which we come to occupy.

There is not an ultimate reality 'out there' waiting to be discovered. Knowledge is produced rather than discovered. Rationality and science, seen as the ways to objectivity by feminist empiricism, are particular ways of thinking. This means that feminism, too, is a particular discourse, or a particular way of thinking (Foucault, 1984) with particular effects.

While the three types of feminist epistemology are set out by Harding (1991) as: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint, and feminist postmodernism, she highlights that these are not absolutely distinct and may interact, inform, or 'be locked into dialogue with each other' (Maynard and Purvis, 1994: 19). Stanley and Wise (1983) insist that marking out the three main epistemological approaches in feminism is only a *model*. It is typical to find elements of all three epistemological positions in feminists' work (Stanley and Wise, 1983).

This thesis bestrides the permeable boundaries between feminist standpoint, feminist postmodernism and post-structuralism while bearing in mind structures and remaining alert to the movements, negotiations, and resistances within such structures. Maynard and Purvis (1994) phrase this as acknowledging the significance of culture and discourse while realising the existence and effects of structures, which have influence outside the realm of the discursive. While we cannot expect people to fully know (and express) themselves and experiences – or for us, as researchers, to be able to access that – we can produce interpretations of them in consultation with participants' own interpretations. While not disputing that there are structures and material realities, any judgement of them is always relative to the context within which this knowledge is produced.

4.3. Feminist Method(ologies)

There is no particular method that is markedly feminist, and such views have increasingly come under attack (Maynard and Purvis, 1994). As England states:

...There is nothing inherently feminist in either quantitative or qualitative *methods*, but what is 'feminist' is the *epistemological stance* taken towards methods and the uses to which researchers put them... (2006: 286-287)

There might not be anything inherently feminist about the method, but this does not mean that we should abandon thinking about methods completely – much can be gained by considering the epistemological stance *guiding* the method and the uses to which the method is put (England, 2006).

Influential in feminists' theorising about the research process are the concepts of reflexivity and positionality (England, 1994; Rose, 1997). One tenet of feminist ethnography is the recognition of positionality; we are situated in economic, social, and cultural relations and these influence the research process. Theories bear the marks of their makers (Skeggs, 1997) and these marks should be written into research. Reflexivity connotes a '...kind of self-awareness and self-scrutiny, [it] asks that researchers consider their own position in the research process, as well as investigating the position of their respondents' (Holliday, 2004: 55). Positionality is defined as how we view the world from different locations (England, 2006: 289), influenced by our autobiographies and how we are positioned in relation to relational social processes of difference. As researchers, we must make visible our embodied presence rather than perpetuating the myth of 'external, detached observers' (England, 2006: 289). Reflexivity, in a research context, means continual self-scrutiny – of ourselves and actions as researchers.

Another commitment at the heart of feminist methodologies is sensitivity to power relations, specifically those implicit in the researcher-researched relationship. Rather than attempting to minimise observer bias, feminists consciously seek interaction with participants, intending to reduce the distance, and establishing relationships based on empathy, mutuality and respect (England, 2006). But no doubt there are situations where this power can never be eradicated: research carried out with marginalised groups by scholars who are in possession of more social power and capital. Rather than ignoring our privileges or dismissing all research with those less powerful, we can attempt to address our complicity and unlearn our privilege (Peake and Kobayashi, 2002).

This acknowledgment of power leads to another central concern of feminist methodologies, which is the commitment to the political goal of exposing and

transforming power and privilege, as well as furthering the interests of women (Mason, 1997) – this might simply be through making women's lived experiences more visible and exploring structures that are unique to women's lives. MacKinnon (1989) argues that consciousness-raising is the feminist method of choice. Examples of consciousness-raising in practice might include action research (Duelli-Klein, 1983), which aims to establish women's collective consciousness to make changes.

After reviewing the key principles of feminist methodologies and epistemologies, can it be argued that there might be some methods that are more or less conducive in upholding these feminist goals? Although the resounding answer seems to be 'no' – 'what characterizes this [feminist] research must be how the methods are used' (Mason, 1997: 27) – others (Hanson, 1997: 125) argue for the development of 'methods and methodologies that maximise the chance that we will see things we were not expecting to see, that leave us open to surprise, that do not foreclose the unexpected'.

4.4. Reflexivity and the Researcher

Reflexivity is the continual self-scrutiny by the researcher both of their actions and their role in the research process or, as Wilkinson puts it, 'disciplined self-reflection' (Wilkinson 1988: 493). Part of this activity involves what Mason (1996: 6) refers to as 'posing difficult questions to oneself in the research process'. Reflexivity involves thinking about our thinking, or how our thinking came to be, so that 'knowledge' and 'reality' are understood as socially constructed since they are interpreted through the person of the researcher. Reflecting critically on ourselves and our research *matters* because researchers are the vessels through which truth claims and meanings are constructed.

These facets of a reflexive methodology are a far cry from the ideals of the positivist research tradition, with its associations of hard data, trials, 'reliable results' (Finlay, 1998: 453), scientific methodology, objectivity, and distance between researcher and research participant. Reflexivity means that the scientific

observer is part and parcel of the setting, context, and culture that he or she is trying to understand and represent (Altheide and Johnson, 1998). The researcher and the 'object' of study mutually affect each other throughout the research process (Haynes, 2012).

One characteristic of reflexivity is 'positionality', the idea that 'all knowledge is marked by its origins' (Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1991; Rose, 1997: 307) as situated in the *position* or the self/selves of the researcher. Where the researcher is located in relation to class, gender, 'race', sexuality, and other markers of privilege is integral to the research process (England, 1994). It is crucial for such positions to be acknowledged, understood, and showcased so readers are aware of where (and who) any knowledge claims come from.

Although the definitions of reflexivity are well explored in social science, the practice of reflexivity in a research context is less clear (Haynes, 2012). For Cunliffe (2003: 991) it entails: questioning intellectual suppositions; recognising that research is a reflexive narrative; exploring researcher/participant relationships and their impact on knowledge; acknowledging the constitutive nature of research conventions; constructing emerging practical theories rather than objective truths; exposing the situated nature of accounts through narrative circularity; and focusing on research as a process of becoming rather than an already established truth. Haynes (2012: 78-79) suggests a more practical approach to being reflexive in research by providing a series of questions for the researcher to ask herself or himself, including: what is the motivation for carrying out this research? What underlying assumptions am I bringing to it? How am I connected to the research theoretically, experientially, and emotionally and how does this affect my approach and interpretations? These questions might be addressed, Haynes (2012) notes, by keeping a research diary to record thoughts and feelings about the research process, listening to recordings of interviews to determine how the presence of the researcher affected the process, and writing down any assumptions and presuppositions about the subject(s) of the research at the beginning of the process, and seeing how these may alter over time.

The Limitations and Challenges of Reflexivity

Some have dismissed the exercise of writing the self into research as mere narcissism, 'navel-gazing', overshadowing the voice of the participant, or shifting the focus away from the actual phenomena under study. Maynard (1993: 329) warns of 'vanity ethnography', where too much emphasis is placed - by the researcher - on 'reflexively locating herself in her work'. The first challenge for the researcher, then, is in knowing when to use reflexivity, and to what degree. Finlay (2002) suggests that researchers should be reflexive only when it seems purposeful to be so, while DeVault (1997) suggests linking reflexive accounts to the broader study, rather than practicing isolated personal emoting. England (1994: 244) offers a stronger counter-argument by stating that reflexivity 'is often misunderstood as a "confession to salacious indiscretions", "mere naval gazing" and even "narcissistic and egoistic", the implication being that the researcher let the veil of objectivist neutrality slip'.

Although much is written about the concept of reflexivity, the task of putting it into actuality is scarcely mentioned. Full reflexivity assumes that researchers are able to unproblematically 'see and know both themselves and the world in which they work' (Rose, 1997: 311): that they know exactly who they are and are able to unproblematically state it. It is dependent upon the existence of a modernist subject that is 'singular, knowable, and fixable' (Pillow, 2002: 180). The task of attempting to un-knit one's position in highly complex webs of power (knowing how one's gender, class, race, sexuality and so on affect the production of knowledge) is so huge that it feels impossible. Rose (1997) argues that these questions are so massive, that we, as researchers, should not imagine we could answer them.

Rose suggests alternative models of reflexivity that attempt to question the researcher's practice of knowledge production without subscribing to 'transparent' modes of reflexivity that seem impossible to achieve. First, we must see reflexivity as a process of *self-construction* rather than *self-discovery*; in other words, there is no transparent self waiting to be revealed. Further, the self that we

are hoping to write about in processes of reflexivity is neither fixed nor stable; it is complex and shifting, as well as being articulated differently through differing social situations. Smith (1996) argues that it is uncertainties of knowledge and language rather than revelations of transparent reflexivity that should be written into research. This view sees research as constitutive of the researcher and the research participants and rejects the idea that there is a 'prior reality or unified identity to gain access to' (Gibson-Graham, 1994: 214). Another strand of reflexivity also comes from feminist geography – Haraway's (1991: 191) 'webbed connections' approach. This notion recognises the knowledge and power of both the researcher and the researched, and acknowledges how this knowledge fluctuates and is negotiated, throughout the research process. In terms of thinking about and exercising reflexivity, this position implies that 'there is no clear landscape of social positions to be charted by an all-seeing analyst' (Rose 1997: 316). The key point to pull from these discussions is that the self of the researcher and participant is not something that is 'revealed' but created through interaction (Gibson-Graham, 1994).

Preceding discussion renders the task of being reflexive and writing positions into research all the more complex and difficult to put into practice. Rose makes the suggestion that researchers should keep these worries in mind (and in their texts), should avoid succumbing to impossible and suspect positions of analytical certainty, and concludes by stating that:

We cannot know everything, nor can we survey power as if we can fully understand, control or redistribute it. What we may be able to do is something rather more modest but, perhaps, rather more radical: to inscribe into our research projects some absences and fallibilities while recognizing that the significance of this does not rest entirely in our own hands (1997: 318-319).

Such complexity ought not to signal a retreat into 'transparent reflexivity' or to no reflexivity at all, but encourage attempts to find a way of using reflexivity while acknowledging its limitations (Pillow, 2002): *being reflexive about our reflexivity*.

4.5. Reflexivity and Positionality in the Field

To further open up and reflect on the 'experiencing, feeling subject at the centre of all intellectual endeavour[s]' (Stanley and Wise, 1983: 193) and to situate myself in grids of power relations, I present a short description of my background, beliefs, biases and baggage and attempt to unpick how this positionality might have impacted on my research. I concur with the multitude of feminist scholars who argue that it is an impossibility to engage with others' lives from a position of assumed neutrality and 'objectivity' (O'Neil, 1995). Bearing in mind the preceding sections on reflexivity and the critiques from DeVault (1997), Rose (1997), Pillow (2002) and Holliday (2004) about the limitations of using the concept in its most transparent form, I am aware of the difficulties of neatly un-knitting our complex positions amidst class, gender, race and sexuality structures and that there is no 'transparent self' waiting to be revealed. To avoid 'mere naval gazing' (England, 1994: 244), I have tried to think about my position relative to the broader study and its subjects (DeVault, 1997) so as not to shift the focus away from the women. Notwithstanding its critiques, reflexivity and an elaboration of personal experience are essential parts of a feminist research paradigm (Wilkinson, 1988).

Insider/Outsider Debates: Situating the Self and 'Other'

A researcher might be perceived as an untrustworthy 'outsider' (Tewksbury and Gagne, 1997) if differences in statuses between researcher and participant are so wide. 'Insider/outsider' debates have come under close scrutiny over the years and are now widely understood as not so clear-cut; that having a shared status does not guarantee trust and rapport. As Dwyer and Buckle posit:

...one does not have to be a member of the group being studied to appreciate and adequately represent the experience of the participants... we posit that the core ingredient is not insider or outsider status, but an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one's research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience (2009: 59).

Given that I have not experienced homelessness, as a researcher, I am mostly an 'outsider' or 'non-member' to the group of participants in this study. I have never experienced alcohol or drug dependency, major debt, and/or physical or emotional abuse (although three years ago, I lost a close uncle to alcohol abuse and have experienced the hurt this causes as a family member). I consider myself to be from a working-class background. However, my entry into academia – especially as a postgraduate PhD candidate with a scholarship – has afforded me certain privileges (to an extended university education and all the opportunities this brings with it; to temporary financial stability and independence; to a broadened network of contacts; and to a better hope of future employment) but still seems different (and often difficult) for me, having attended a comprehensive school in which higher education was rarely mentioned let alone aspired to. Given that I am currently immersed in the middle-class sphere of academia, my classed identity is somewhat fragmented and contradictory, still containing fragments of my past working-class self. My education has put me in a different location, often in one of hierarchy to most of my participants whose educations had frequently been disrupted.

Although there are gaps - in terms of housing status, educational privilege, and current financial stability - I have felt some frustrations due to being from a low-income family enough to better empathise with the women in this study. My political ideologies, commitment to social justice campaigns and view of homelessness as an injustice also positions me as sympathetic to the plight of homeless people. There were nevertheless situations when I was acutely aware of differences. One instance of this stands out clearly for me. This extract was written in my research diary on the day the incident occurred:

Only just felt composed enough to write anything about today. I had a hard morning at the Breakfast Club and Centre. My emotions were already on edge when I arrived to find Frankie in tears. She eventually managed to calm down enough to tell me how T had abused her a week ago by forcing her up against the sink and forcing a tea-towel down her throat. She has bruises down one side of her body and had to go to hospital for the damage it had caused to her throat. Although I sat calmly while Frankie told me all this, I had to get off the tram four stops early because I couldn't stop crying thinking about it.

Although I remained sensitive to Frankie's story, I cannot claim to fully know how it would feel because I have not experienced domestic violence myself. At the same time, as a human being and a woman, I can appreciate how it might feel and can attempt to learn about it more from Frankie. I was deeply shocked and angered over what had taken place, and also felt an overwhelming sense of helplessness over not being able to help Frankie.

While my participants and I might have been different in some respects, we shared common ground and affinities in others. Identity is multi-layered and fluid, suggesting that non-membership of a group does not denote complete difference.

Research Relations in (and out of) the Field

Engaging on an interpersonal level with research participants is often a tense and emotional experience. As Warr (2004) argues, as engaged social subjects, we are simultaneously researcher and participant in the research process. Research entails an involvement in people's lives that places us in a relationship with our participants (Warr, 2004). Like any relationship, the ones we develop throughout the research process are often bound to be ambiguous and complex. There were several times in my fieldwork when the boundaries between 'researcher' and 'friend' seemed blurred, which for a short time, placed me in an ethical quagmire. This dilemma arose in my research encounters with Frankie, inevitably so as she was the research participant I spent the most time with and welcomed me into her flat to conduct interviews. On numerous occasions I arrived at Frankie's flat to find she had cooked a meal for me, which we ate before beginning the interview. Frankie was inquisitive about my life and I happily responded to her questions. Although I was pleased that Frankie felt comfortable enough to tell me about her life, after a few months, I began to worry that our relationship was becoming confused and boundaries between researcher and 'friend' were becoming fuzzy. An entry from my research diary highlights the anxieties I felt around this issue at the time:

Following my anxieties about the ethical dilemmas of becoming 'too close' to Frankie (or any research participant for that matter), I have started to collect literature which discusses these issues. It seems that the main problems are: raising participants' expectations of continuing friendship which might not then be realised; adding to the list of the participant's transient social relations, i.e. parachuting in and out of a person's life especially if these lives are lonely; the participant not understanding the research role and purpose (although this should be tackled in information sheets, consent forms, and tropes of the research process - recording conversations, arranging interviews); dangers of exploitation if expectations are not the same on each side, i.e. can I be a friend if I am there within the artificial framework of research?; and the participant becoming dependent on me or my research which poses problems when the research ends (this makes 'ending' the research/contact difficult). This raises the questions: can researchers be friends, or just 'friendly' with participants during and after the research process, and what are the ethical implications of this?

I was aware that this issue was not mine alone, but had been experienced and written about by several other researchers (Acker *et al*, 1991; Watson *et al*, 1991; Cotterill, 1992; Gair, 2002; Johnson and Clarke, 2003). One common anxiety among researchers who become close with their participants – an anxiety that I certainly shared – was the issue of 'leaving the field', or saying goodbye after the fieldwork comes to a close. Sadly, I did not get chance to say goodbye to Frankie, as I lost contact with her. Towards the end, Frankie's drinking got worse and she began missing interview dates. One day I received an unexpected telephone call whilst at the office. It was Frankie. I noticed that she sounded quite desperate and in need of someone to talk to; she told me that she had been feeling very 'low' lately. I told her that I would phone her straight back (I knew that she was usually short of phone credit) but on doing so, the phone simply rang off the hook. After several failed attempts and worried about Frankie's state of mind and wellbeing, I decided that the best option was to phone Frankie's key worker at the Housing Project to ask if they would call round and check that everything was okay. I then phoned a few hours later and the key worker assured me that Frankie was fine. This was the last I heard, but I am still left wondering how Frankie is doing lately. The intense emotions felt in my encounters with Frankie made me realise that I could not handle the same level of closeness with all of my future participants; it would be too much to bear. Although the nature of my research encounters with other participants was not the same anyway – conducting interviews in a meeting room in their hostels and meeting them less often did not bring with it a chance of

developing a close relationship – I planned to maintain firmer boundaries (mainly to avoid further emotional stress) whilst still trying to foster a sense of rapport and sensitivity.

During this situation, I noted the contradictions and the conflicting pull of calls from feminist methodologies to blur the distinction and soften power hierarchies between researcher and participant (Hertz, 1997), while at the same time managing the additional stresses and dangers that this poses.

4.6. The Research Process

Recruitment and Access

I decided that the best way to recruit participants would be through homeless services, whether drop-ins, day-centres, hostels, or other supported housing projects. I came to this decision based on the understanding that established services would provide a trusted contact, or gatekeeper, able to signpost potential participants capable of giving informed consent; to provide support or aftercare following interviews; as well as offering a safe and comfortable space for interviewing. Once this decision was made, I created a database of suitable organisations to approach, including their location, the type of service provided, the name of the main contact and their contact details. This was repeated in three major cities in the region, easily reachable by public transport. This information was found through online city-wide forums, or through typing 'homeless services in [name of city]' into an online search engine.

The first point of contact with services entailed an email (see Appendix 1) setting out who I was, what my research was about and what it would involve (on the part of the stakeholders and participants). It offered how I might help out in a small way at their organisation, as a way of saying thank you for their participation. This letter emphasised the visual element of the research to a greater degree than in-depth interviewing, partly as a means to attract interest. However, the interviews and further details of the fieldwork were discussed at a follow-up meeting with the managers of the organisations, if they agreed to take part. I approached services in

the nearest city first, sending out thirteen emails to thirteen organisations to begin with. Seven organisations responded, five arranging a further meeting, and two declining due to not fitting the remit of the study (not having many women accessing their services). After the meetings, one more organisation was deemed unsuitable due to its main user group being street drinkers, who might have struggled to give informed consent, and whose lives, it was thought, might have been too chaotic to dedicate time and effort to a participatory photography task. This contact was carried out in two waves – one at the beginning of the fieldwork year, and another half-way through, when it was felt more participants were needed. The second wave also entailed contacting an organisation discovered through an academic contact, and this proved more fruitful than using the database alone. Participants were recruited from a total of five organisations, encompassing: two hostels, one women's centre, one church-based drop-in centre, and one supported housing project for young people (the participant accessed through the church-based drop-in centre was also part of a supported housing project, which I liaised with at a later point).

The next step involved the creation of a flyer (see Appendix 2), advertising the nature of the research, what would be involved (and the photography element), a background to myself as the researcher, and contact details if the participant wished to find out more. These flyers also displayed the university logo to emphasise credibility and reputability. Although I displayed these posters in some of the services accessed, participants were never recruited solely through these alone; rather, it was through word-of-mouth or through trusted gatekeepers that participants came to take part. The flyers thus became visual aids for describing the research with participants.

A prior stint of voluntary work – a few months before the fieldwork commenced – was conducted to help to orient my research, provide an initial insight into the workings of such services, and to establish some contacts within the sector, and pushed me in the right direction towards homeless organisations who may have been interested. Emmel *et al* (2007: 2.3) note that immersion in the research community, prior to fieldwork, builds credibility. I volunteered at a local breakfast

club, frequented by several 'vulnerable' groups in the community. Initially, I hoped to access my first participants here, but found it almost impossible to identify and approach women who might or might not have identified as homeless, especially in a setting where most people came to socialise, relax and forget what other problems they may have had for one morning a week. Even with the assistance of the breakfast club organiser in pointing out a possible participant, my efforts went unfounded, and it was not possible to establish if this particular woman would have been able to fully comprehend and consent to taking part in the research. Nevertheless, although I did not recruit any participants from this breakfast club, it was helpful in the sense of pointing me in the direction of other services – I noted that many users of the breakfast club moved on to a nearby drop-in centre afterwards, which is where I found my first participant.

Once gatekeepers approved participation in the study, recruitment of participants differed in each organisation. At all but one organisation, staff (managers, key workers, support workers) approached specific individuals first and got back to me with a suggested date for an initial meeting with the participant(s) – this was usually on a one-to-one basis, but was done in a small group setting in two cases. In one hostel, however, my main point of contact was the receptionist who introduced me to residents by knocking on doors. I felt uncomfortable with this method, worrying it was a more intrusive way of recruitment. It was also unsuccessful. Although agreeing to participate at the time, upon my next return to the hostel, the women had either moved out, or were not in. At this point, the receptionist asked another three women (who were in) if they wished to participate, and I then incorporated my initial meeting into the first interview (as they agreed to be interviewed there and then).

Gatekeepers from homeless organisations in the voluntary sector were fundamental in helping to locate individuals who fitted the sampling criteria (Emmel *et al*, 2007), as well as providing a point of access through a trusted person. From the outset, it was crucial that gatekeepers were informed that formal ethics procedures had been met, such as an up-to-date Criminal Records Bureau check, and that the university's ethics committee had approved the research.

Approaching gatekeepers entailed the production of an information sheet containing details of the research project, a researcher biography, and terms of participation, which was followed up in conversation at a later meeting. As well as facilitating access, gatekeepers also, at times, impeded or slowed access, meaning that initiating research was sometimes difficult and time-consuming. In some cases, interviews were arranged through hostel staff and this – although making it less likely that the participants would miss or forget their interview dates – also meant that it took longer to organise.

Participants

Although this study was small and cannot attempt to claim representativeness among the female homeless population, it was hoped that the images, words, and stories produced by each individual woman would be rich. It was decided to involve *no more than* fifteen participants (in the end it was twelve), so that rapport was viable within the given timeframe. Since the numbers were small, it was important to know who to approach. At the start, it was deemed advantageous to select women for their diversity in order to reflect their heterogeneity whilst ensuring that they meet certain minimum loose criteria: women, over the age of eighteen, able to give voluntary consent, and able to be accessed through homelessness or related support services.

A concern was not to produce a statistically representative sample, but to purposively sample amongst people whom delineated different social groups who might see their situations in slightly different ways. As the participant biographies (below) show, women were of different ages and backgrounds, so that a diversity of homelessness experiences could be captured. However, the working definition of homelessness, as well as the diversity of homeless women, was constrained through practical and ethical necessity to people who were in contact with homelessness agencies (rather than from the less visible 'hidden homeless' population), and to women who were willing to participate, given that considerable time and effort commitments were required of the women. Thus,

although some of the women had experienced rough sleeping at one point in their homelessness pathways, none were rough sleeping at the time of interviewing.

Seven women were staying in a hostel (Katie, Jo, Danni, Jenny, Gretel, Tori and Becky), four were staying in supported accommodation attached to housing projects (Bella, Lucy, Leah and Frankie) and one was temporarily sleeping on a relative's couch and accessing support through a women's centre (Jules). While there might be gaps in my sample, in terms of types of homelessness, I highlight the difficulty in accessing this group (Shantz, 2012) surrounding finding and identifying homeless women at all. It would have been far more challenging, both ethically and practically, to access women who were sleeping rough or living in B&Bs had they not been in contact with services (especially given the time and resource limitations of a PhD study). While not a perfect solution, some women had experienced rough sleeping in the past, which gave me some insight into other homelessness experiences.

Another challenge was *who* to involve in this project through definitional issues. As past studies (Watson and Austerberry, 1986; Cramer, 2002) have shown, subjects do not necessarily identify as 'homeless'. Nevertheless, by approaching participants through homelessness services, it was assumed that the women accessing them would likely be experiencing issues around housing and/or home. Staff confirmed that all residents/service users at their organisations were not in positions of stability regarding housing. Since this study attempted to interrogate the very use of the term 'homeless' as a way of categorising and defining identities, it followed that my own use of the term 'homeless' for convenience was problematic but unavoidable, and this was questioned in subsequent interactions and interviews with women who did not have consistent residence in a dwelling (Kidd and Evans, 2011).

Participant Profiles

Although I am aware that the following profiles offer only a simplified, caricatured version of participants, and that the exercise of neatly surmising a person's life or

identity is futile, it is done here with the intention of providing a brief introduction to the women in this study.

Frankie

Aged 49 at the time of interviewing, Frankie defined her ethnicity as 'very mixed... I've got French, Portuguese, I've got Irish, I've got English, you've got Indian'. Frankie was residing in temporary supported accommodation for homeless and vulnerable adults 'with complex needs' and was allocated a flat by the housing project. She received daily visits from a key worker. Frankie had undergone several traumatic life experiences including divorce, and the death of her mother, alongside struggling with (and attempting to recover from) alcohol dependency and agoraphobia. Frankie had served a short term in a women's prison, for arson (after a cigarette set fire to a relative's property when Frankie was under the influence of alcohol). Frankie previously lived in a large, detached house with her then husband and son (now aged 26 years old) in an affluent area.

Bella

Bella was 22 years old at the time of interviewing. She emphasised her difficult childhood and adolescence. After her mother and father separated, and her mother found a new partner, she described how her family began to split apart: her mother would not allow Bella or her siblings to see her father, so her sisters moved out, and Bella started to 'act out' at school. As Bella claimed her mother could no longer handle her, Bella moved into care at the age of 13. Bella felt unwanted and unloved by her family, and in this sense, may have experienced home-lessness (a lack of home-feeling) before she was officially defined as 'homeless'. Bella previously resided in a hostel, but had recently moved into a council flat, still receiving continued support from a housing project.

Gretel

Gretel was 23 years old at the time of interviewing. She had been living in the hostel for two years, having moved in when her family moved to Australia. Gretel had had a fairly unsettled housing history, moving house was common, and she

reports living in inadequate conditions. Gretel's passions included designing her own t-shirts, playing in a band, and playing basketball and football.

Tori

Tori was aged 20 at the time of interviewing. She described her life so far as 'hectic', having a drug addiction at an early age and moving out of her family 'home' at the age of 14 due to family disputes (she did not 'get on' with her mother). She also lived in a women's refuge for a period of time, fleeing her ex-partner. She now lives in a hostel. Tori has a three-year-old son, who was taken away from her during her period of drug addiction. At the time of interviewing, her son lived with her ex-partner/his father. Tori's passions included running and football; her ambition was to be a football coach.

Danni

Danni was aged 20 at the time of interviewing. She was brought up by her mother and grandmother, and later, also by her step-father. After moving in with her then boyfriend, Danni became addicted to drugs and alcohol and started 'getting into trouble all the time'. At the time of interviewing, it was Danni's second stay at the hostel; she has been living there on and off for about three years. Danni's main passion was dance; her ambition to become a dance teacher.

Jenny

Jenny was 20 years old at the time of interviewing. She then resided at a hostel (she had moved in two months prior to the first interview), since her family made plans to move to Plymouth, and Jenny wished to stay where she was in order to finish her college course (Health and Social Care) and concentrate on her education. Jenny was a young carer for her mother and her younger siblings. Jenny described her upbringing as relatively stable until her step-father moved in; he was an alcoholic and abusive to her mother. Jenny had a part-time job in a bar and worked voluntarily at a school; her ambition was to work with young people. Her main passions were playing guitar and song writing.

Jo

Jo was aged 32 years at the time of interviewing. She was residing at a hostel for single homeless people, or those at risk of becoming homeless. Jo had lived in the same village for the most part of her life, moving out when she was 23 years old to live with her then partner. Jo admitted that her 'life spiralled out of control' when she moved in with him. He was a drug dealer, and soon, Jo became addicted to drugs herself and became more and more isolated from her family and friends. Jo eventually left him but still felt that her life was 'out of control'. Jo had eventually realised that she needed support and had stopped taking drugs a year ago (from the date of the interview). Jo was on sick leave from her job as a Customer Service and Sales Team Leader while she recovered. Jo was very close to her family, and frequently looked forward to seeing her niece and nephew.

Katie

Katie was aged 31 at the time of interviewing. She was also residing at a hostel for single homeless people and told me how she felt settled and happy there. Katie described her upbringing as 'normal', though later mentioned that she was abused as a child, and frequently moved in and out of refuges as a result. Katie was diagnosed with mental health issues (psychosis) after taking an overdose, and had previously been sectioned under the Mental Health Act. Katie has two sons, but both had been taken away from her by Social Services; one lived with his father and the other lived with adoptive parents.

Jules

Jules was aged 30 at the time of interviewing. Though Jules was brought up in foster care she described her upbringing as stable. Jules was then residing with her grandparents, but did not see the situation as ideal, as she did not get on well with them and felt that the space did not feel like her own. Previously, Jules had lived in hostels, and had also spent three months in prison (for reasons not disclosed but she said it was something minor). Jules had ambitions to become a Drama Therapist.

Leah

Leah was aged 18 at the time of interviewing. She lived with her mother on and off due to frequent arguments and disputes. Her mother had a dependency on alcohol, which was often the cause of conflict in their relationship. Leah lived with her uncle for five months after one argument, and later, with her ex-boyfriend's parents before moving into a hostel and then her new flat (where she was currently residing). Leah's father left when she was five years old, and though she has made contact with him since, does not do so anymore.

Lucy

Lucy was aged 28 at the time of interviewing. Lucy was brought up by her grandma from the age of 12 years, since her mother could not bring her up anymore; Lucy no longer had contact with her mother. She has a seven-year-old son. At the time of fieldwork, Lucy lived with her grandparents but would shortly be moving in with Bella, which she was looking forward to doing. In the past she had lived in a hostel (and did not enjoy staying there) and in several different houses with her mother (until the age of 12).

Becky

Becky was aged 18 when interviewed. Though I did not find out much about Becky's situation (having conducted only one short interview with her which she found challenging) she did tell me how she grew up in a small, post-industrial town, where she had lived for most of her life before moving in and out of hostels. She mentioned how she had been 'kicked out of' her previous hostel due to her 'behaviour'. Becky had past issues with drug addiction but was now in recovery. By the time of my second visit to collect Becky's camera, staff reported how she had been missing from the hostel for several days and were unaware of her whereabouts (I found out from one of her friends that Becky was sleeping on a friend's couch after an incident at the hostel).

This research involved conducting both participatory visual methodologies – auto-photography and photo-elicitation interviews – and semi-structured interviews. I opted to use visual methods given their capacity for building rapport, participation and collaboration; their 'novelty factor' (Lombard, 2012) which helped to recruit and keep research participants (Emmel *et al*, 2007) as well as making the research process a more enjoyable experience; as well as being an important tool for exploring identity (Gauntlett and Holzwarth, 2006; Noland, 2006).

Given the intended feminist underpinnings of this research, the starting point for employing visual research methods was their emphasis on participation, or as Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006) posit, their potential as 'enabling' methodologies. Participatory visual researchers have cited their connection to and inspiration from feminist theory (Harper, 2012). This participatory approach attempted to involve participants at several stages of the research, namely, through inviting participants to create images as part of the research process (auto-photography) and then trusting participants to make their own interpretations of those images in the follow-up photo-elicitation interview. I hoped to allow for a process of 'reflection', by giving the participants more time to think about what they wished to express about their identities; to be able to do this creatively; and to express what may be difficult to express in words alone (Guillemin and Drew, 2010).

Participatory visual methodologies offer an alternative to traditional social scientific research approaches, which frequently come under attack from feminist scholars (Reinharz, 1992; Letherby, 2003) on the grounds that they use participants as mere 'suppliers' of data. Traditional approaches also rely on language as the only means of accessing interpretations. Recent years have witnessed increasing use of visual research methodologies (Knowles and Sweetman, 2004).

I was aware of the potential pitfalls and challenges of using visual methods, as other researchers (Buckingham, 2009; Brady and Brown, 2013) have cautioned.

These include the on-going issue of anonymity. Brady and Brown (2013: 105) note the tension between 'not [wishing] to deny a young woman's agency' and feeling uncomfortable anonymising images on the one hand and considering the long term implications of including personal images and details on the other. Buckingham (2009) highlights the danger of taking a naively transparent view of visual methods, seeing them as a direct means of enabling participants to 'express themselves' or 'tell their own stories' without being filtered through the interpretation of the researcher. Another challenge was how the social conventions of photography constrain the participant's choices of photographic subjects (Guillemin and Drew, 2010). To resolve this issue, explicit permission was granted to participants to photograph 'the good, the bad, and the ugly'. Packard (2008) draws attention to the specific challenges when using visual methods with homeless participants. In his case, participants did not have the 'capital or confidence' to communicate their knowledge visually, and felt uneasy when having to explain their images. His participants also struggled to operate the cameras, resulting in 'spoiled' photographs, which resulted in feelings of inadequacy, embarrassment and disappointment among some men.

Far from deterring me from employing visual methods, these examples served to strengthen my approach, as efforts were made to prepare for such eventualities. After thoroughly reviewing literature in the field, it was decided that the benefits of using visual methods far outweighed the risks, as long as they were employed reflexively and ethically. Visual methods are: a useful tool for communicating identity by emphasising the plurality of experiences (Bijoux and Myers, 2006; Gauntlett and Holzwarth, 2006; Noland, 2006; Shortt, 2012); a means of allowing participants to reflect on things they may not usually contemplate, or of 'making the familiar strange' (Mannay, 2010); inclusive of groups that traditional research methods tend to exclude (Aldridge, 2007); a useful stimulus in the research interview (Bukowski and Buetow, 2011); participatory and enabling of participants to define their lives as they see it, rather than the researcher (Wang *et al*, 2000; Phoenix, 2010; Richards, 2011); a way of recruiting 'hard-to-reach' groups (Emmel *et al*, 2007); and a way of going 'beyond' language which can be seen as constraining for some (Dodman, 2003).

Discussion in this section describes my fieldwork journey, outlining the reasoning behind my choice of methods; how they were carried out with the women; their successes and challenges; and the follow-up period and photo exhibition. A broader reflection on whether the research methods successfully met initial methodological aims and my own expectations is offered in the latter part of this section.

Initial Meetings

Where possible, I briefly met with the women interested in taking part in the project. These meetings usually took place at the hostels or day-centres and were intended as an introduction (to myself and the research), allowing the women to ask questions or voice concerns that could not be addressed by the Information Sheet alone. I found these meetings to be important as a way of easing participants into the research process (and facilitating rapport in future encounters), and ensuring that participants fully understood the research before consenting to take part. At this stage, the photographic element of the process was mentioned to get a sense of how keen the participants were to do this, or whether the method needed adapting or changing altogether. Knowing from the start which participants were less confident about the task allowed me time to plan ahead and think about ways of supporting them. The initial meeting was also a time to discuss participants' preferred choice of incentive payment (where choice was permitted by the homeless service). A date for the first semi-structured interview was arranged (usually a week after the initial meeting). The value of these initial meetings was starkly realised when – for pragmatic reasons – they did not take place. Two participants (Jo and Becky) were asked by a member of the hostel staff if they wanted to be interviewed (since Katie, who I'd arranged to meet for the first interview, wasn't there), and they agreed. This made me feel slightly uncomfortable, as though the women might have felt compelled to take part because they had to give an immediate answer. An extract from my research diary highlights this:

It didn't turn out quite as expected, since Katie wasn't there but two new women who wanted to take part were. I felt slightly daunted at first as I hadn't prepared for two interviews and had never met the women before. Talking to Jo was okay because she was really reflexive about her life. But talking to Becky was very difficult.

I struggled to build rapport with Becky throughout the interview, and picked up a sense of her not feeling comfortable talking about herself in this way. As Becky said in this interview, 'I don't know. I don't know what, really, what to say. I'm a bit shy me'. Whether or not Becky would have felt more comfortable had we met previously can only be speculated since she left the hostel.

Homeless Biographies: Semi-Structured 'Background' Interviews

An in-depth, semi-structured interview explored participants' personal histories and routes into homelessness (termed 'homeless biographies' by Johnsen *et al* 2008: 196). This interview was loosely structured around a topic guide (see Appendix 3) but this was altered, deviated from, or dispensed with completely depending on the participant, and how the interview was going. Frankie, for instance, told her 'life story' with ease and mostly without prompt. Since I spent a considerable amount of time with Frankie, this process was spread over the space of four interviews, which she preferred (some subjects were difficult for Frankie to recount and sometimes the interviews ended prematurely). Employing both verbal and visual methods constituted a multi-method approach, allowed participants to tell their stories via different mediums, and was also a way of establishing trust and rapport prior to asking participants to take photographs.

I ensured that all interviews were scheduled for a time that best suited participants, and this was discussed and arranged at our initial meeting. For women staying in hostels, interviews took place in a separate meeting room or 'art room'. Interviews with Frankie were held at her temporary flat where she felt more comfortable. Most interviews with Jules took place at a table in the foyer of a women's centre, following her key worker's suggestion that this might be the best option given Jules' anger issues (though once trust had been established, we sometimes held the interviews in a separate counselling room).

At the beginning of each interview, I explained each term on Consent Form 1 (see Appendix 5) and asked the women if they needed any further clarification. If women still wished to take part in the study, their signatures were sought. I also gained permission to audio record the interview and explained my purposes of this (also indicated on Consent Form 1 in Appendix 5). If women wished to remain anonymous (as most did) I asked them to choose a pseudonym as a further way of allowing participants to exercise choice and collaboration in the research process.

Topic guides were split into six parts, which included an opening and closing section (see Appendix 3). Section One ('Opening Lines') involved introducing myself (if we had not had an initial meeting), re-stating the purpose of the research and explaining the interview and its expected duration. The participant was reassured that they did not have to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering, and that all opinions were valid. Section Two aimed to find out general introductory information about the participant as a way of easing them into the interview with simple, non-contentious questions. Section Three moved onto participants' daily life and routines. Section Four constituted the main part of the interview, delving into homeless pathways and experiences, and feelings towards becoming homeless, as well as what 'home' meant to them. Section Five asked how being a woman might alter their experiences of homelessness. The closing section left space for women to discuss anything that I had not asked, and importantly, to discuss the photography exercise.

Auto-Photography

In this study, visual methods contributed to both working with and understanding women whose voices are seldom heard, and for whom traditional verbal methods were not always the most effective form of inquiry (Charlesworth, 2000). Visual research methods offered a critique of positivist, western-styles of verbal articulation, which for the most part, have come to be considered the norm in social research practices. Yet, many researchers have critiqued their use with certain groups. Bowler (1997) described her failure to elicit data through ethnographic interviewing with women of South Asian descent, finding that the

women desperately tried to give the 'right' answer or to be polite. Bowler (1997) also found that interviewing was conceived of as a strange and foreign way of constructing the world for these women.

Given that the starting point of a feminist approach is to present a vehicle through which women can find their own voices, and considering that homeless women's voices are seldom heard in dominant policy, research, and cultural climates, it was vital to utilise methods which would better facilitate women's self-expression. Invoking the theoretical insights of Smith (1987), and her 'standpoint of women' perspective, which begins with the 'actualities of people's lives' (Smith, 1992), I started from the perspectives, skills and interests of the women and attempted to fuse these into my methodological practices.

Participants were invited to generate their own images, utilising cheap disposable cameras and/or using the participant's own mobile phone cameras. Auto-photography allowed participants to showcase their life worlds as well as to interpret them. Use of auto-photography complemented feminist theory by attempting to confront power relations through sharing information. Auto-photography is committed to the co-production of knowledge between researchers and researched, allowing active engagement of people as 'meaning-producing beings' (Holloway and Valentine, 2000).

At the end of the first interview, participants were asked if they would feel comfortable doing the photography exercise, or if they would prefer to do something else instead of or as well as this, such as bringing in their own photographs (on phones, from purse or room etc.), drawing, or just talking. Most (all but one) participants agreed to do the photo exercise. Participants were drawn to photography because of its 'novelty factor' (Richards, 2011: 2). They were given a pre-prepared 'camera pack' which contained a disposable camera and a guidance sheet (see Appendix 8), which I talked through with them. Guidance was left relatively loose – so as not to impose my own ideas on the women's choice of photographs – but detailed enough to provide adequate guidance. Verbal guidance proved to be essential here, and it was this that reassured participants rather than

the guidance sheet itself (which was something participants could take away and refer to later). This confidence at handling the camera varied and was therefore assessed on a person-to-person basis. I gave extra guidance where needed, as was the case with Bella. Bella texted me several times asking if she was 'doing it right', so I followed this up with a phone call and arranged to meet her again when she was next in the centre. After a discussion, Bella decided she would prefer to send me existing photographs via Bluetooth that 'said something about who she was' instead. Photos were immediately transferred to the computer and deleted from my phone. Two copies were printed out (one for myself and one for the participant to keep) as they were for the disposable cameras.

I originally planned to collect cameras after two weeks, but in most cases, it was longer than this, as participants wished to take more photographs. This proved to be challenging in some respects, given that I wanted to allow participants time to take enough photographs that said something about their identities, while not wanting the process to take so long that participants became bored with or forgot about the task. I kept in frequent contact with participants, gently asking how they were doing with the exercise, to act as a reminder and a way of checking if participants needed further support.

Despite the challenges of auto-photography outlined above, the process proceeded without any major hiccups. All participants (that were able to do) completed the task, took it seriously, and seemed genuinely excited about looking through their photographs. Perhaps the participant feedback sheets speak the loudest volumes (Appendix 9). Of the five women who completed them, all agreed that the project was explained to them in enough detail; all were happy with the photographs they had produced; three out of the five stated that their favourite part of the project related to the visual element (either taking the photographs or explaining them in the follow-up interview). One challenge arose in the earlier stages of the fieldwork when working with Frankie. At this stage, I handed Frankie a second consent form, intended to seek consent from any subject who might appear in the photograph. After discussing how Frankie was finding the experience of taking photographs, and finding out she had felt unable to take certain photographs because she didn't

have the consent forms with her, I decided to change tact. The impracticality of this type of consent form has been raised elsewhere (Lombard, 2012) as impeding spontaneity, being an inconvenience for the participant (something extra to carry around), and in some cases, being futile (if the participant expresses a wish to remain anonymous, all subjects in the photographs would have to be blurred anyway). However, so as not to intrude on people's privacy, and to maintain good practice, I advised participants still to seek verbal consent from photographic subjects, and this seemed to work well. Subsequent issues arose concerning how to display the photographs in my thesis, explored further in Section 4.8.

Visual methods enhanced the depth of disclosure and rapport between researcher and participant. This finding has been reported elsewhere in the visual methodologies literature (Langa, 2008). The photography exercise required repeated visits to the organisations and frequent contact with the women, which enhanced my relationship with the participants. This was reflected in the women's willingness to share deeply personal stories with me in interviews, despite the difficulty in reflecting on these traumatic pasts. This was helped by the number of times I met with the women, and the trust they invested in me as a consequence of this. The women often expressed great pride in their photographs, and said they intended to keep them to look back on. The level of collaboration involved in visual methods coincides with the emphasis on reflexivity and interdependence between researcher and participants in feminist theory (Lather, 1986).

Photo-Elicitation Interviews

A significant motivation in opting for photo-elicitation was how it enabled participants to interpret visual material themselves instead of simply taking the researcher's interpretation as gospel. It has been argued that such practices prove motivating for participants if they help to prompt memories or emotional responses (Buckingham, 2009). Underpinning photo-elicitation is a notion of sharing – not only the cultural worlds but also arriving at understandings together. This goes some way to redressing imbalances of power between researcher and participant often cited as a major methodological obstacle in feminist research.

The 'photo-elicitation' interviews discussed the participant's images, for the participant to further articulate their meanings. The topic guide ensured that the basics were ascertained, including: what the photograph depicted; why the participant had chosen to take the photograph; and what they felt about the subject/place/object depicted. In order to prepare for the interviews, I numbered each set of photographs to make it easier to look through and refer to on the recording. I looked through the photographs in advance of the interview to familiarise myself with them and write down anything specific I wished to ask the participant about. I gave one set of photographs to the participant and kept one for myself. The participants usually looked through their photographs first before we began the interview. It was always interesting to see their reactions – often they would laugh, smile or show their friends. I intentionally kept the topic guide as brief and open as possible to allow the participant more room to explain the photograph on her terms, interjecting only to ask the participant to elaborate further or to seek clarification.

The method of looking through the photographs was left open to the participants – some went through them one-by-one, others spread them out on the table and picked random photographs to talk about, often grouping similar ones and talking about them together. The majority of discussion flowed from the participant as prompted by the photographs. Some interviews were shorter than anticipated – it was expected that photographs would facilitate in-depth discussion (Rose, 2007) – and I often had to prompt participants to divulge more about a photograph before moving onto the next one. This challenge is little acknowledged by other studies using photo-elicitation which cite the ability of photographs to foster discussion by giving participants something tangible to focus on (Clark-Ibanez, 2004) – with the exception of Packard (2008: 73) who noted how 'these interviews proceeded very rapidly, with the participant providing as short an answer as possible'. With hindsight, it might have been better to always arrange the photographs on a desk, to avoid participants rushing through the pack of photographs and to better control the pace of discussion.

While the length of discussion did not extend, in my case, the subject of discussion did. The photographs provided routes into other areas of participants' lives and identities that would otherwise have remained hidden. For example, Jules took several photographs around rural areas where she often went on walks (see Section 5.6); Jo similarly took photographs around her walking route; and Frankie took photographs of 'meaningful objects' around her flat – none of which would have been picked up on if it was not for the photography exercise. In this sense, one of the strengths of this method was that it enabled participants to become the 'documenters' which 'shift[ed] the focus of the study...towards [participants'] cares and concerns' (Goessling and Doyle, 2009: 346).

After their discussion around the photographs had ended, I asked participants which photograph(s) best summed up their identities. Participants often found it difficult to choose just one. This exercise was important as a way of prompting participants to further reflect on their photographs (and their selves). I then asked participants to reflect on their experience of the process to ask if they had enjoyed it, whether they felt it was a good way of portraying their identities, if there was anything they felt unable to photograph, and what they would have preferred to do differently. Suggested improvements nearly always included the opportunity to take more photographs over a longer period of time which would give participants chance to capture things that better represented their identities. As Tori said, 'it was hard because of like... pictures I wanted to take of me... it was like I didn't really wanna do it but... so I just took certain pictures to show what I get up to and that. But... we wasn't playing football at time either so I couldn't take no pictures of that or anything so... I did find it a bit hard yeah, I couldn't really find what pictures to take'. Gretel reported problems around remembering to keep the camera with her, which meant she didn't take all the photographs she wanted to (but then by the end of the period with the camera, she felt 'bored'). Others expressed enjoyment of both the photography exercise as a whole as well as the process of explaining the photographs: 'with a picture, it's easier to translate, it's easier to explain'.

Next, I talked through Consent Form 3 (Appendix 7) with participants and we discussed how and where the photographs would be displayed. Participants were asked if they wished to exclude any photographs *completely* from the research and all other potential outputs and these were either handed back to participants or destroyed. The matrix on Consent Form 3 allowed participants to exclude certain photographs from a range of outputs, to allow for a range of possible 'consents' (thesis, books, conference papers or 'all of the above'). This consent form also asked participants if they would be happy to appear in the photographs (blurred or not blurred).

I asked participants if they wished to complete captions to attach to their photographs, briefly describing the content. Some participants wanted to complete them there and then; others wanted to do the exercise in their own time. We arranged a date when I would come back to collect them – most women stuck to this but others had either forgotten or were un-locatable when I returned. Not wanting to pressure the women too much, I asked staff to gently remind women about the captions but to reassure them not to worry too much about them – hence why some sets of pictures are missing captions. Since captions were not a vital element of the process, and mainly for descriptive purposes, huge efforts were not made to chase them up.

The process of reflecting on self-identity through the process of taking and sharing photographs is described by Schwartz (1989) as being a 'transformational' process. While one must be cautious about claims to 'empowerment' (Buckingham, 2009) of any method, it is fair to cite the potential of visual methods as being reflexive, and ones which position participants to a certain degree, as 'authors of their own stories or narratives' (Langa, 2008: 10). This does not mean that these stories are neutral or transparent or somehow offer a direct route to women's experiences: acknowledging the role of the researcher in producing and presenting this material is vital to a research project which takes feminist insights seriously. However, that the women put considerable thought and reflection into deciding which photographs to take suggests that they experienced a sense of agency and had a strong sense of responsibility in undertaking the task.

Many photographs reflected women's everyday experiences but also allowed them to create and express their fantasies about life, suggesting a projection into a different desirable future. The visual method technique was attentive to the lived experiences of women in multiple roles, identities and experiences: this follows Widerberg's (2008: 113) claim that identity 'theoretically understood as multiple I's, requires empirical methods that can contribute to the unfolding of the I into a variety'. This is in contrast to approaches that continue to compartmentalise aspects of women's lives. Barthes (1982: 13) describes photographs as 'polysemic', in that they generate multiple meanings in the viewing process, which counter the positivist notion of there being one absolute truth. Coupled with the accompanying narrative, the photographs gave a particular depth to understanding the lives of women experiencing homelessness.

Visual methods thus offer a unique methodological tool to explore self-representations of identity, offering a collaborative method allowing women to interpret their own experiences. It is a process that engages participants in critically reflecting on their everyday lives: as one participant said 'I'm going to go away and write in my notebook what I'm going to take photos of'. As such, it encourages participants 'to construct new ways of thinking about their lives' (Morgan *et al*, 2010: 33).

Follow-Up and Exhibition

Where possible, I returned interview transcripts to participants. Although I had intended this as a means of following good research practice (McNiff, 1988), even being *able* to return transcripts was a difficult task. It required frequent visits to the hostels as I felt it absolutely necessary to return them to the women in person, to protect confidentiality. This meant that some women did not receive their transcripts, as they had left the hostel or day-centre before I could reach them. Others, I had lost contact with earlier in the research process.

After fieldwork had concluded, I sent a letter to participating organisations to thank them for their support and access, and to ask them to contact me if they

were interested in co-convening an exhibition of the women's photographs. Two organisations got back to me. However, for anonymity/confidentiality reasons it was decided to only display photographs from women within their own hostels/day-centres. This would allow women to collaborate on the project and see the results of it. Hence, I opted to carry out the exhibition in the hostel with the most participants so more women could be involved. The first stage of arranging the exhibition involved establishing the women's interest (via the gatekeepers) and then meeting with senior staff from the organisation to create a mind-map of initial ideas regarding how we would go about convening the exhibition, its location, and time-scale. The main emphasis was placed on the women's involvement and contribution so they would feel to have a greater degree of ownership over the exhibition. We agreed that the photographs should be displayed in the hostel's art room to which the women had easy access. The next stage entailed meeting with the women (alongside a member of the hostel staff) to gauge their ideas for displaying the photographs. It was eventually decided to display the photographs in suspended Perspex displays and the women wished to present their photographs on posters decorated with captions, quotes, drawings and collage. I put together an information sheet to provide background on the topic for viewers.

Arranging the exhibition was far more difficult than expected, and I often felt uncomfortable meeting the women for a planned workshop when it was clear they had other things they would rather be doing. At these times, I asked the women if they would prefer to take the posters away to complete in their own time (they agreed). This begs the question of participatory research: to what extent do participants feel compelled to participate (especially in settings where 'participation' is actively encouraged, like homelessness services)? This worry was ever-present, especially at this stage of the research process, meaning the exhibition took a long time to set up so as not to pressure participants. This also questions the idea that giving participants 'full ownership' of the research process is empowering. While this may work in some cases or for some groups (Richards, 2011), for others it might be daunting, challenging and time-consuming necessitating a more flexible yet supportive approach. I agree with Robinson

(2011: 127) in that, 'giving authorship to the participants is not simply a question of stepping back and leaving them unsupported but rather of finding the balance whereby they have sufficient support and encouragement to produce the work successfully, without the facilitator's personal views or aesthetic coming to dominate'. Trying to find that balance between support and pressure was what I found most challenging.

4.7. Analytical Processes

As outlined in Chapter Two, I attempted to draw on revised versions of Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory (which, as a methodology of analysis, emphasises the 'generation of theory') to inform my analytical approach. I continuously went back to the roots of the empirical work to ground my theories. I acknowledged the impossibility of ignoring literature and theory so as not to 'contaminate' the emergence of categories, as advised in earlier strands of grounded theory. I did not 'force' data into my theoretical framework but left space for it to emerge; nor did I abandon the theoretical framework completely. Rather, theories acted as 'skeletons' to which the 'flesh' of the empirical data was added (Kelle, 2005: 40). Rather than pretending a 'blank mind', then, this thesis has elaborated my theoretical (Chapter Two), epistemological (Section 4.2) and personal (Section 4.5) positions, or 'baggage', which were taken into analysis and through the whole research project.

Transcription

I saw transcription as part and parcel of the analytical process, as a 'research activity' rather than a 'technical detail' (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984). I felt it was worth transcribing all interviews myself, in full (using NVIVO10 qualitative data software), in order to get a better 'feel' for the data. I kept as much detail as possible to the transcripts, attempting to retain as much authenticity and resemblance to the actual conversation as possible. I retained word forms, speech styles and speech fillers (ums and ahs, laughter) giving a verbatim account of the interview. However, as much as I attempted to stay as close to the real conversation as possible, I was aware of the impossibility of achieving complete

accuracy. As Mason (1996: 53) posits, transcription never provides an 'objective record' of the interview, as some verbal utterances are not recordable. Non-verbal aspects were also left out of transcripts. Transcription provided a useful point to begin analysing the interviews in a reflexive sense, to see how well participants understood my questioning, to determine where I might need to ask further probing questions, and to modify topic guides accordingly. Earlier transcription often proved frustrating as I realised with hindsight how I might have delved further into a participant's response. I was also involved in an on-going interpretive process (which began during the interviews themselves) when transcribing, slowly piecing together a picture of important/unexpected/expected themes as they emerged.

Coding

Analysis really started before transcription as responses in interviews were processed to shape further questioning, reflected on again immediately after interviews had taken place, and again during transcription – and was thus an iterative process (in that ideas were initially vague and were then further refined). Once interviews had been transcribed, they were read through several times as a whole. First, a detailed commentary was recorded in the margins of transcripts and next to photographs; these consisted of initial reaction to interviewees' responses, the content of the photograph in terms of how it was described in photo-elicitation interviews. I organised photographs into general categories in conjunction with themes that emerged from the discussion. Although no system of classification could do justice to the levels of meaning in the photographs, the photo-elicitation exercise went some way in helping to take account of the images' complexity. Analysis was done in an open and grounded manner first, without too much restriction from my theoretical framework, to ensure that nothing would be missed. This process was repeated for all transcripts and photographs until all key themes and ideas gradually built a coding frame. As analysis was performed openly, the coding frame was cluttered and unclear, so the next task involved reducing it to manageable portions (Davies, 2007). The long list of codes in the framework was repeatedly re-organised by merging codes and grouping similar

codes together under a broader theme; other codes 'die[d] a natural death through lack of use' (Cope, 2005).

Next, the coding framework was re-visited and refined as it was arranged according to my theoretical framework, or to key theories of identity. After this process, I was left with five key themes: identity as social; identity as comparative; identity as actively constructed; identity as performative; and identity as a 'reflexive project of the self' (Giddens, 1991). Once these themes were defined, I then went back to the data to gather further empirical evidence to test the appropriateness of the category under question. This proved to be a useful process as it helped to provide structure to previously free-floating categories, as well as establishing which themes seemed to be the most important. However, not all codes fit into these categories, and I was left with large chunks of data related to women's experiences of home that did not fit neatly into theories of identity as such, but nevertheless seemed important to informing an understanding of how homeless women negotiated their identities within a context of homelessness. I chose not to rigidly stick to my theoretical framework and allowed themes and findings to emerge more naturally from empirical data. Resulting themes were therefore both *a priori* and inductive.

The final stage of analysis occurred when themes and codes were organised into and written up as larger findings chapters. Writing, as a process of analysis, allowed me to draw together empirical research with elements of my theoretical framework and the literature, and I found this to be the best way of thinking through my data in depth and of drawing out its significance and contributions.

4.8. Ethical Framework

Research with groups who are commonly seen as 'vulnerable' and marginalised must exercise extra caution. In this case, participants had issues with drugs and alcohol; had experienced abuse and/or domestic violence; had gone through the social care system; had mental health issues; and more often than not had experienced several of these issues at once. Although research is needed to

understand the experiences of homeless women, it was absolutely necessary that this research fully considered its implications, potential harms and ethics. The use of visual methods also posed several 'new' ethical dilemmas. These specific issues, as well as more general ethical considerations related to social science research, are elaborated in the following sections, as are measures taken to ensure that the most ethically-sensitive research was conducted with the women in this study. Not all ethical issues were 'resolved' fully and remain subjects for debate.

My research is rooted in feminist methodology, which seeks to incorporate an 'ethic of care' by placing the voices and interests of participants at the forefront of the research process and preserving people's presence as subjects. A feminist approach encouraged me, as a researcher, to address how my own personal identity politics, or positionality, was (or was not) allied with the participants. In particular, this entailed that I examined how assumptions stemming from my own social background may have affected my interpretations of the experiences of the participants (explored in Section 4.5). I recognised that I would be in a more privileged position than the women, and that simply acknowledging this fact does not automatically make my research free of hierarchical power relationships.

Anonymity

My research aimed to counter the negative stereotypes and images of homeless women in society by offering women the chance to take pictures that said something about who they were and what their daily life was like. Anonymising participants, through the use of pseudonyms or computer software to obscure identifying features, seemed to contradict this aim.

Anonymity is a taken-for-granted ethical norm in quantitative and qualitative research, embedded in various codes of ethical conduct. The British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice adopts the following stance:

The anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process should be respected... Where possible, threats to the confidentiality and anonymity of research data should be anticipated by researchers. The identities and research records of those participating in research should be kept confidential whether or not an explicit pledge of confidentiality has been given... Where appropriate and practicable, methods for preserving anonymity should be used including the removal of identifiers, the use of pseudonyms and other technical means for breaking the link between data and identifiable individuals (BSA, 2002: 5).

The principle of anonymity is necessary to protect those involved in the research from any potential harm or embarrassment (Walford, 2005). But there are also circumstances when the need for anonymity is less clear and may require considerable review; by the researcher whose research aims conflict with the principle of anonymity; whose research participants want to be identified; or whose research uses participatory visual methodologies who may encounter difficulties in anonymising photographic data. It is not surprising, then, that in recent years, a growing number of researchers have questioned the prevailing orthodoxy of anonymity (Grinyer, 2002; Piper and Simons, 2005; Tilley and Woodthorpe, 2011).

These ethical tight spots become ever more pressing for research which uses participatory visual methodologies where the participant photographs herself and consents to this image being included in the thesis and further published materials. In this situation, my main concern was the longevity of published material and how a person's consent to appearing in such publications may change over their life course – what they feel comfortable consenting to now may cause embarrassment in the future, by which point it would be too late to do anything about it. Professional visual studies groups offered little guidance. The Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association's Visual Sociology Group states:

There are however, major difficulties in anonymizing data in research using visual methodologies especially; in the use of photographic data. Special consideration should be given to the outcome of the study, and the potential harm that the research could bring the researched and the researcher(s). Before undertaking this form of research it is advisable for the member(s) to liaise with a professionally recognised ethics board (2006: 6).

A less patronising approach might entail seeking consent for anonymity from each individual participant, and respecting the right of participants to make an informed decision. While this solution might have been sufficient, I remained uneasy about causing harm to participants by revealing their identity while at the same time, aware that anonymity might lead to a 'loss of ownership' of stories and a contradiction of research aims to make homeless women's experiences and identities 'more visible'. In the end, I decided the best option was to negotiate anonymity with the women, following a thorough explanation of the issues involved. Most of the women wished to remain anonymous and for their photos to be blurred in my thesis and in any related published materials. The women who did not mind 'either way' did not happen to take any photographs where their face was identifiable (which was perhaps their own way of remaining anonymous without having to explicitly say so). When the photographs were examined, I explained that any undesirable ones could be removed from the pack and either given back or destroyed. In the photo exhibition at one of the hostels, the issue of anonymity arose again, as it would have been challenging (and counter-productive) to display blurred photographs in a project intending to showcase their work. Autonomy was handed to the women in this case, as they chose their six favourite photographs to display.

Discussion of Sensitive Topics

Interviews discussed the everyday experiences of homeless women and their identities (as well as topics emerging from their choice of photographs); this at times involved sensitive topics. I wished to place emphasis on how the participant interpreted the images, and valued first and foremost the interpretation by the participant. The use of such a method placed greater priority on participation than on rigorous objectivity. The use of more participatory visual methods allowed scope for participants to have a greater influence over the research process. Participants dictated, to a greater extent, which stories were told and which remained silent. By focusing on collaboration, and the idea of creating something together, agency was shared between the researcher and informant.

I did not ask or delve into issues of a particularly sensitive nature but participants sometimes brought these into the discussion. In such a case, while I acted as a 'sympathetic listener' I deemed it inappropriate to take on the role of 'counsellor', since this would have been beyond the scope of my training and/or experience. In order to manage such issues of sensitivity, it was necessary for me to draw on the expertise of my supervisors who have had past experience and training in interviewing vulnerable people and who offered advice and support throughout the research process.

Safeguarding Vulnerable Participants

I ensured that research was only conducted with adult participants, over the age of 18, who were able to give voluntary informed consent after understanding the purpose of my study. I underwent an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check, which was evidenced to gatekeepers and service users at the homeless services where my research took place.

I ensured that participants were safeguarded and considered the effects of my work, including how it may be misused. For example, any image which may cause embarrassment or which had the potential to damage an individual's reputation – at that point in time or at a later date – would not have been included in my thesis or any further publications (although this did not arise), and participants were asked if there were any images they wished to exclude from the research. Personal information, concerning research participants, was stored securely and kept confidential. When using visual methodologies, it was difficult to disguise participants' identities without introducing a significant degree of distortion. Participants were made aware of this issue at the start of the research, and the extent to which I would have to adapt visual data if the participant wished to remain anonymous.

When conducting the photo exercise, the safety of participants was placed above the spontaneity or power of the image. Participants were briefed beforehand about the use of cameras. It was emphasised that participants must be aware of their surroundings and potential dangers and that any photograph which may put the

individual, researcher, or community in danger must be avoided (for example, in violent settings).

To ensure the safety of the participant, in their practice of auto-photography, it was necessary to abide by UK law when taking photographs, and to ensure the participant was aware of this via discussion, and an Information Sheet. The general rule was that anyone may take photographs in public places or in places where they have permission. Concerning images of people in public places, the understanding is whether the place is one where a person would have a reasonable expectation of privacy. Again, the general rule was to seek verbal consent wherever possible.

Safeguarding the Researcher

It is not possible to enter another person's world in a sanitised fashion; research as an 'outsider' may at times provoke feelings of discomfort and therefore requires the establishment of safe research practices. My supervisors, who are experienced in conducting interviews with homeless women, provided support on safety issues throughout the course of my research.

I provided supervisors and colleagues at CRESR with details of the venue and times of interviews. I used a 'phoning-in' system, whereby a colleague was contacted via telephone at the beginning and end of the interview. Where possible, interviews were conducted in homelessness services, where an experienced gatekeeper, who knew the participant well, was at hand. I took into account how the presence of a gatekeeper may infringe on the comfort of the participants, so (as in Frankie's case) interviews were conducted at the participant's temporary flat. I ensured a framework was developed to ensure sound health and safety procedures, by consulting the University Health and Safety Manual, as well as the University Lone Working Policy.

Informed Consent

In providing informed consent, participants expect not to be deceived or coerced into taking part in the research, are informed of the purpose of the research and the research process, and understand the uses the research will be put to.

Working closely with a gatekeeper helped me identify potential respondents who were in a position to give informed consent. Before the research began, I explained its nature and purpose; its intention; and information regarding withdrawal, via a clear and accessible information sheet and consent form given out to all potential participants and gatekeepers. I had a responsibility to explain my research in appropriate detail and in terms meaningful to participants. However, even though participants collaborated in the production of data and photography, it was unlikely that their understanding regarding the project would have coincided exactly with mine. The degree to which consent is truly 'informed' with individuals who may not fully understand the nature of PhD research is questionable.

Two different types of consent forms were required. The first (see Appendix 5) addressed basic ethical principles, adapted to visual methods, and included issues such as: the purpose and goals of the research; the nature of the methods, the degree to which the participant will be involved, the number of interviews, and the intent to record the interviews, if possible; the potential use of the images and data, and the participants' consent to assign the copyright of the image to the researcher for these uses; the voluntary nature of participation and the rights and terms of withdrawal; the small monetary token to participants for taking part; my agreement to provide cameras and to cover any financial costs incurred; notification of any possible risks when taking photographs; availability of further information, including findings from the research; and my contact details.

The second consent form, which was signed once all photos were developed, sought the participant's willingness to permit or exclude any photographs from the research. This was important since it allowed the participant to exercise a degree of control over the images produced and what was done with them.

Information sheets (Appendix 4) which clearly outlined the purpose, intended use, potential risks and hoped-for benefits of the research were produced and distributed to potential study participants. Potential participants were given a reasonable period of time (at least 24-hours) to consider this information and consult others. A cut-off point for withdrawal of data of one year after the final interview had taken place was specified. If participants decided to withdraw during this period, any data collected would have been destroyed immediately (though this did not happen). I considered information provision and informed consent as a process rather than a one-off event, so any subsequent interviews obtained further consent, albeit more informally, via audio recording at the beginning of interviews. Participants were informed of how far they would be afforded anonymity and confidentiality, and made aware that they could reject the use of voice recorders during the interview (though none did).

Participants were fully briefed about the task so they felt confident about using a camera; and I assessed the feasibility of the method by talking about the experience of taking photographs with participants during the initial interview. This confidence varied and was assessed on a person-to-person basis. Some participants found the task easy, while others found it daunting and were given further direction concerning possible content for their photographs (without being too overbearing), or alternative methods were discussed.

In the case of respondent-generated visual data, according to UK Copyright Law, the copyright of the image rests with the creator of the image (the respondent) and it is necessary for them to assign permission or copyright to the researcher for subsequent use (obtained via the first and second consent forms). I took particular care to explain the status and use of visual imagery and the participants' own legal rights under UK law.

Other risks regarding visual methods related to legal issues including the creation of images that depict illegal activity. Clearly, while copyright rests with the respondent, these were issues that needed to be managed equally by the researcher. At the outset, the respondent was fully briefed about acceptable and

legal issues regarding photographic content (on the Information Sheet and verbally, at the start of the fieldwork); any image that did not meet these standards would not have been used or included in the research. The first consent form stated that images depicting illegal activities, including sexual violence, terrorism, or child abuse would be reported to the relevant authorities, and would not have had the privilege of confidentiality. This was as much to protect vulnerable individuals in society, as it was to protect the researcher.

Data Protection

I ensured that participants' confidential information, images and data stayed secure. Media files were anonymised and transferred to a secure location on the computer as soon as possible. Interview transcripts were anonymised immediately. Signed consent forms and information sheets were kept secure at all times.

To protect the confidentiality of the participants, it was not enough to simply anonymise participants within written work and transcripts. With visual methods in particular, difficulties exist regarding anonymity. Participants needed to be informed of this issue and the extent to which the research would have to adapt visual data.

Avoidance of Harm to Participants

While my research was unlikely to cause harm as, for instance, drug trials may, there was a risk that it might lead to emotional stress or anxiety. I recognised that research is never a neutral exercise, but is characterised by inequalities of power and status between researcher and informant. While some participants enjoyed the auto-photography exercise, as well as having the chance to offload, others found it challenging. I recognised how aspects of my research might have been disturbing for some participants and attempted to minimise distress caused to those participating.

The participants for this study were recruited because they were women who had issues around home and housing, who accessed services for homeless people. Yet, some did not necessarily identify as 'homeless' and found this label inaccurate. Since this study attempts to interrogate the use of the term 'homeless' as a way of categorising and defining people's identities, it followed that my own use of the term 'homeless' for convenience had to be considered, and not used in my interactions with the women participants who did not always wish to be identified in that way.

Use of Incentives

Participants were given a set of photographic prints to keep. Compensation, in the form of a small monetary sum (of £15) or voucher (to the value of £15), was also given to the participant at the end of the research as a gesture of appreciation for their time. Incentives may compromise voluntary informed consent. At the same time, others have argued that it is more exploitative not to offer financial incentives. This issue had to be discussed with gatekeepers at the outset of the fieldwork, who recommended which form of incentive to give to participants (some encouraged money, others preferred vouchers).

My research is grounded in the idea of collaboration, through handing the camera over to the participants and asking them to create something as part of the research process. If research is seen as a process of negotiation, rather than as an act of taking information away, then the ethical agenda also shifts.

4.9. Conclusion

This chapter has delineated the process of carrying out my research including the epistemological, methodological and ethical positions guiding it. While parts of the process were at times practically and ethically challenging, fieldwork was equally a considerably rewarding experience and one of the most enjoyable aspects of my PhD. From adapting elements of the research focus, to negotiating complex ethical dilemmas, being 'out in the field' was both exciting and informative, in terms of giving me invaluable knowledge about the workings of a large-scale research

project. My methodological approach allowed participants to engage in more participatory processes of self-definition, reflecting a feminist and participant-centred approach to research.

The next chapter moves on from the *processes* to present the *findings* from analysis. The first empirical chapter emerged from the data in a grounded fashion, rather than from the theoretical framework *per se*. This relies on empirical data relating to women's experiences of home and homelessness and their relationship to identity. This chapter goes to the very root of the issue, almost moving back a step, to explore what home means to the women to better understand how it might be lost.

5. Home(s) and Homelessness(es)

5.1. Introduction

In order to understand how homeless women negotiate their identities while homeless - a key aim of this thesis - the relationship between home and identity must be scrutinised. Key questions pertinent to this chapter are *to what extent is a sense of identity drawn from home or place? And, if home is inextricably linked with a sense of identity (and even more so for women), does the loss of this home entail a loss of self (even more so for women)?* It is necessary, first and foremost, to understand how the homeless women in this study defined 'home'. Only then can we understand whether their (officially defined) homelessness represented a loss of a sense of home.

A focus on the meanings of home is significant because of the assumption that homelessness ruptures a sense of home, and by extension, a sense of self (Wardhaugh, 1999; Boydell *et al*, 2000). Discussion here critically examines the supposed link between home and identity, and subsequently, what it means for identity if 'home' is threatened by homelessness. There cannot be any understanding of homelessness without first understanding what it means to have a home (Wardhaugh, 1999; Kellett and Moore, 2003). Understanding the subjective meanings of home for participants is additionally significant, given the arguments presented in Chapter Three, that the meanings of home are gendered. While universal or absolute truths do not exist relating to women's experiences of home, much of the literature suggests a relationship between:

...home and domesticity on the one hand and women on the other, as well as the expectation of women to raise and sustain a family, home and the perception of home as a feminine, private domain, distinct from the outside, masculine world (Peled and Muzicant, 2008: 435).

It follows that 'if women are recognised as having a different association with the concept of home, then they may also have a different experience of homelessness' (Cramer, 2002: 22). Similarly, as Watson suggests, 'women may be located at a different point on the home-to-homelessness continuum than their male partners' (1984: 62).

The deconstruction of home has taken place against a backdrop of the examination of the concept of place. Stating that there is 'no place without self; and no self without place', Casey (2001: 406) pinpoints the theoretical linking of identities with places, whether this place is physical, psychological, or symbolic. More specifically, the space of home itself has become a locus of identity; a notion tied to identity; a 'base around which identities are constructed' (Easthope, 2004: 134). As Jacobs and Smith argue:

Among other things, scholarship such as this shows how home is a complex field of feelings and subjectivity: an anchor for the senses of belonging, a mechanism for living with, and in, the experience of transnationalism, and *a site for constituting and performing selfhood* [emphasis mine] (2008: 515).

The social perspective tends to interpret the home as a 'statement of identity' expressed through a shared symbolic language (Goffman, 1959; Appleyard, 1979). Bachelard (1969) uses the house/body metaphor to suggest that the house is commonly experienced as a symbolic body or womb which protects the occupier, while Dovey (1985) argues that when this metaphoric body of the house is broken into there is often a lingering feeling among the inhabitants of being personally contaminated or violated. The places we inhabit are said to hold very strong sentimental and emotional attachments:

...there is for virtually everyone a deep association with and consciousness of the places where we were born and grew up, where we live now, or where we have had particularly moving experiences. This association seems to constitute a vital source of both individual and cultural identity and security (Relph, 1976: 43).

Over the past three decades, there has been burgeoning interest in the concepts of place, home and identity (Feldman, 1990; Case, 1996; Moore, 2000; Holloway and Hubbard, 2001; Holloway *et al*, 2003; Cresswell, 2004). Home is a space imbued with deep feelings and vested with emotion (Cresswell, 2004). The very concept of home suggests that it is a key element in the development of people's sense of themselves, as belonging to a place (Proshansky *et al*, 1983). As Chow and Healey (2008: 364) state: 'at moments of change or transition, when the bond between

person and place is threatened, the significance of place identity becomes apparent'.

If home is 'a site for constituting and performing selfhood' (Jacobs and Smith, 2008: 515), the very lack of home or roots implies an absence of space in which to [per]form this selfhood. Loss of place, or home, may entail a loss of self, due to the deep-rooted social and psychological connections between the two. Thompson (2007: 1) claims that to lose the home is 'overwhelming', with resulting 'far-reaching' physical and psychological impacts on self-identity. Likewise, when identity is shaken by significant changes, one may feel like one does not belong or is far away from home (Biernat-Webster, 2010).

Despite these purported effects on the self, there has been little research on what happens to the self when the home is lost as a consequence of homelessness. If the normative concept of home is its association with rootedness, belonging and fixity, then it follows that transience stands as its societal anti-thesis. As Olwig (1999) posits, travel and home are usually regarded as polar opposites. While several works cited here (Wardhaugh, 1999; Boydell *et al*, 2000; Thompson, 2007; Biernat-Webster, 2010) support the idea that a loss of home leads to a loss of self, findings in this study suggested otherwise. The homeless women who were the focus of this study often lacked the normative values of home (patriarchal family relations, privacy, ownership), which left them feeling home-less some of the time. Yet homelessness did not necessarily entail loss and absence of home completely; it often led to the creation of alternative 'homely' spaces, and the carving out of other identities in other areas of life. These findings add weight to a number of other studies, which have looked at the meanings of home for adults without permanent housing, to suggest that the family home or house is not always the cosy image that Bachelard depicts (Veness, 1993; Robinson, 2005), including homeless youth (Kidd and Evans, 2011); homeless women (Hill, 1991; Tomas and Dittmar, 1995); women experiencing domestic violence (Meth, 2003); the street homeless (May, 2000; Sheehan, 2010); runaway girls (Peled and Muzicant, 2008); and individuals who feel 'homeless at home' (Bennett, 2011). The homeless girls in Peled and Muzicant's (2008: 447) study found themselves 'emotionally and

physically trapped in limbo between the resistance to home and the need for it, on the road between one home to the next'.

Discussion now moves on to look at key findings which emerged from a grounded analysis of empirical data.

5.2. The Past Home

Memories are ghosts that won't lie down (Read, 1996: 11).

In understanding what home meant to participants in the present, it was important to disentangle their home-life experiences prior to their current homeless situations. 'Home', for some participants, was a space (and a feeling) firmly located in a selectively recalled past. It was a nostalgic yearning, a concept always distant and beyond reach. In such a sense, participants for whom home was a thing of the past are compared to the figure of the exile, one who is translocated voluntarily or by coercion (Friedrich, 2002).

Frankie, in particular, was characteristic of the exile, presenting a predominantly idealised and nostalgic version of home as the past house that she shared with her (now separated) family, a home and home-life she could not return to for reasons pertaining to her divorce and need to live in supported accommodation, due to mental health issues and alcoholism. Indeed, even if she could return to her former house, it would not be the same. Frankie gave eloquent and vivid descriptions of her 'other house', and decorated her present flat in ways that purposely mimicked and evoked memories of this past home:

'Cause I like lights, 'cause in my other house, my second house, in Broadfield... a massive garden, both front and back, and I used to have an arched tree, a path going from my front door, it was on the corner you see. So it had like a window there, and then a bedroom window there, a bay window here, and then a long window up there for a bedroom. And it sort of went in, a recess, and then you'd got a sort of arch, with a porch, and then an old – not an old, but it looked very old – door with leaded glass panels. And beyond that, on the arch trees at Christmas, I used to have those fairy lights; that's

why I used to call it the Alice tree. We lived on Alice Tree Lane, but I called it the Alice Tree because there were two big conifers and I trimmed them into an arch. And I had a wishing well at the bottom. And I called it the Alice Tree and I used to put fairy lights on there. (1)

F: I used to get fresh holly with the berries on from Jake's school. The caretaker used to go round and cut all the holly for the staff. So I'd got loads of that everywhere. I'd got mistletoe up, but mainly holly, holly was everywhere. So everything was just so festive. I even had the cinnamon and the...

L: Christmassy spices?

F: Yeah, the spices, yeah. I had all that going off. I used to make my mince parcels. Filo parcels... with Jake. And I always used to put Nat King Cole on. What was it? [sings] 'Chestnuts roasting on an open fire...' ... every morning he came on... you know, during Christmas. Well before Christmas actually. Beginning of December, my tree used to be up. And I used to put Nat King Cole on. As I was putting the tree up, I used to get some sherry, and I used to sip sherry. You know, it was just really festive. And one particular... when Jake was a bit older... I'd got beams in my kitchen, you know wooden beams in my kitchen... he said 'Mummy, mummy, come on... I've got a surprise for you' I said 'What?' 'Please, Jake, what are you doing? You know what I'm like'. He said 'No, you'll like it'. And he turned the lights off in the kitchen and it was just full of fairy lights on the beams. And he sort of draped it down onto the door, part of the door, so it could still open, on top of the door. And I went 'Oh, Jake!' I cried. And I looked from the outside, 'cause we'd got the patio, from the dining... sitting room... and I went out into the back garden and I looked and it was just so great 'cause I've got the leaded windows everywhere apart from the patios' (2)



Figure 1: Photograph by Frankie

Frankie vividly recalled the details of her former home, prompted by reflections on the above photograph (*Figure 1*) of fairy lights in her current flat. The former 'home' was described by Frankie as idyllic, and romanticised, a 'private' cosy cottage in the countryside with 'a massive garden', 'a bay window', 'conifers', and 'fairy lights'. In quote (1), I was guided, as if in a virtual tour, down the path, to the front door, and around the garden of Frankie's former house. Frankie's description was so vividly recalled that it felt like I was almost there, looking up at the house with her. It is a cosy image that is elicited, a vision of house and home that many aspire to but only ever dream of attaining.

Frankie's accounts of home paralleled the images of the 'ideal home' (Kellett and Moore, 2003) with its privacy, leaded bay windows, and fairy lights, and this perhaps also exerted a powerful influence on Frankie's recollections. In quote (2), Frankie recalls how she decorated her house for Christmas, taking us on a multi-sensory tour around her memories of the house: we picture the holly on the fireplace and the fairy lights on the beams; we smell the cinnamon; we hear the Nat King Cole song; we taste the sherry; and it feels as if we are there. And, no doubt Frankie has returned to the house that she treasures but has been displaced from too. It is through memory, as King (2008) suggests, that we attempt to regain what is lost. It is arguably in times of major shifts that we are more prone to look back at ourselves (Boydell *et al*, 2000). What is distinctive about Frankie, and indeed the exile, is that the physical space she now inhabits is not the one she wishes it to be, the one that resonates with her most closely. This is what King (2008: 71) claims as being the problem of the exile: 'of being displaced and yet capable of remembering place... We have a great yearning, but we cannot fulfil it with anything but memory'.

So, while Frankie's marital home was held in a nostalgic place, it also became the source of feelings of unsettlement when situations arose in later homes that were less than this 'ideal'. Such sentiments were encouraged when notions of the 'ideal home' were held in tension with lived experiences:

It reminded me of that, you know, I can reminisce now without getting upset about the homes that I used to have when I was married. And I think, well, it was nice, but obviously, you have to re-build your life and move on, don't you? But that just reminded me of that. I do get, you know, flash backs of... lots of dreams as well. Lots and lots of dreams. All to do with my family and my past (Frankie).

Frankie, throughout her homelessness, had been trapped in what she saw as less-than-ideal accommodation (see quote 1 below), which affected how she felt in herself (quote 2). Frankie felt fearful at the prospect of having to 'move on again' and of being allocated something 'horrid' that would 'set [her] back':

I think, well, it's frightening being here. I get scared of change. I get really scared of change and adapting again to... but I know I've just got to keep telling myself it's just a stepping stone. It's just a stepping stone and I don't want to – like I told Lauren at TWP – I don't want to be put somewhere... 'cause I've been in some dives, I mean dives (1)

I've come such a long way... but I do get fearful for when I do have to move on again... I hope it's not going to be... I hope it's going to be something like this... and nothing that's going to be really horrid.

L: Hmm...

F: You know...erm... because that would set me back...

L: Hmm... so was it where you were living that kind of affected how you felt?

F: Hmm.... and the people... (2)

While she was residing in these places, and separated from her 'home', all Frankie had to rely on was memory: 'that does remind me of the little fairy lights, that's why I like to see the fairy lights on there'. As 'home' for Frankie consisted of her biological family, this home-place first became ruptured when her mother died. Frankie kept a photograph of her mother in a shrine-like display in her living room, ritualistically lit a candle for her every morning, and spoke to her when times were tough believing she could still listen and offer guidance:

That's when I look at my mum and I'll say 'mum, I've not done anything to deserve this. Please, you're here to try and guide me mum'. And I talk to my mum, and I feel better when I talk to my mum. I do. Because I know she's still with me (1).

But no, it's really given me a really good wake up call, 'cause I spoke to my mum, last night, Lindsey. And I said 'mum, I thought you were' –in front of

Farrell – I said ‘mum...I thought you were here to give me guidance’. I... honestly... I meant it.... I meant it and Farrell just looked. I said ‘...but I know you will, mum, I know... I’ve got every faith in you’ (2).

The moon, because it always, it comes here when it’s a full moon, and it’s always got the star at the side of it, always and then it’ll move round. And the full moon is there...with a star at the side of it. And I always relate that star to my mum (3).

Frankie kept the memory of her mother alive by continuing to ‘talk’ to her, and in a sense, she could return home again. King (2008: 71) refers to this process as ‘returning through internalization’, of being unable to actually physically return but nonetheless attempting to go home, to regain what is lost, through the power of memory.

As well as being a place of yearning, memory was also a place of safety and comfort for the women. Home was wrapped up in the past parental home, where the participants grew up, or their past home with their own families; linking their sense of home with sharing, caring and familial security. No matter what trauma or anxiety the women were going through at the time, they could dwell on these past homes as sources of comfort, or as ‘protected intimac[ies]’ (Bachelard, 1969). When directly asked ‘where is home for you?’ Frankie replied that it would always be her parental home, as did other participants:

Home will always be, will always be with my parents... I mean, as a child, I don’t know if I mentioned this...I was always unhappy going to school... erm, because I missed my mum and dad... and I always used to cry... and like, when it was like the six weeks holidays we used to go to my grandparents, that’s my mum’s parents... erm, and stay there for six weeks and it was horrible, it was only through the last week that I’d get used to it... I used to cry and cry and cry. And my dad used to come see me every day... and my mum. You see, they used to go on holidays and you know... erm, well, just have time out for themselves you know, because they did do a lot for us. Erm, but I’ve always been like that... always... erm, that’s why I know if anything happened to my father I don’t know how I’m gonna be. I really don’t know how I’m gonna be (Frankie).

L: So I was gonna ask, like, where do you feel that ‘home’ is for you, is it Newpond or...?

B: Newpond, yeah. All me families down there so.... And that’s where I’ve been brought up and that. (Becky)

L: Erm, where would you describe as home?

G: Erm... at my dad's. I think... yeah...

L: Why's that?

G: Or at my mum or dad's 'cause that's where I can always go to if I need to, that's where my family is. (Gretel)

I would say my mum's home is a true home 'cause it's family. You're never alone, you've always got your brothers, your sisters, your mum, everyone you love are there; that's a home. Where there's cooked dinner and you know... where here, it's pot noodles. But yeah, I mean cooked dinner and erm, and just being around each other, even just sitting in front of the TV, you know, which is the opposite of what I do here, I don't sit in front of the TV, I'm always doing something else. (Jenny)

Memories of the childhood home were memories of security and comfort, for some of the women; though, as this chapter will later discuss, this was not the case for everyone: a place where 'you're never alone', and 'where...family is'. King (2008: 74) describes the remembered childhood home as a place 'in which there are few troubles and things need not be understood, only felt'.

Dovey (1985) observes that home is a place where identity is continually evoked through connections with the past. What Dovey (1985: 7) terms 'temporal identity' is a way of establishing 'who we are by where we have come from'. As such, Dovey (1985) argues, the memories we possess of our former home environments help to create our current experiences and understandings of home. Dovey (1985: 8) posits that home is a 'schema of relationships', one of which is with the past: 'through having memory anchored in the forms of home place and from the experience of familiarity and continuity that this engenders'. In some cases, participants still felt the family house as home regardless of whether life there had been good or bad. As discussions of their pre-homeless lives will demonstrate, and as will be highlighted later in this chapter, most of the participants had experienced negative homes and life experiences prior to their homelessness:

Yeah... it started really bad when I was about 13 when he was drinking heavily. I think... but I never got abused. Erm, but my mum used to get hit about (Jenny).

Erm... yeah, I just grew up in a normal family life, stuff like that. Yeah, I was abused as a child at some point (Katie).

Like my mum and dad's house when I lived with them... my dad lives on a right posh estate, I don't know how but... and my mum's got a nice house as well. So... I shouldn't have just run away (Gretel).

As these quotes highlight, many of the women's past home lives were far from ideal: Jenny and Katie suffered and witnessed physical abuse; and Gretel ran away from 'home'. Such comments echo the observations of feminist scholars that home can also be a place of fear and entrapment, especially for women (Bennett, 2011). However, these negative aspects or memories did not prevent their presentations of the family house from being considered 'home'. These women still felt 'at home' there, with their families, where there was 'cooked dinner' and you can 'sit in front of the TV'.

In complex or difficult situations, May (2000), Robinson (2002) and Robertson (2007) found that individuals expanded and diversified their definitions of home as coping mechanisms. Indeed, if 'everyday family' and 'at home' activities took place there, it may be enough to constitute that space as 'home' despite its accompanying difficulties. Memories are partial: it does not matter how accurately the women remembered home; what matters 'is that we need something to cling to when we are alienated' (King, 2008: 75). As Tuan (1974: 241) suggests, 'emotion felt among human beings... can be said to create things and places to the extent that, in its glow, they acquire extra meaning', and as Dovey (1985: 8) states, 'the memories reflected in the home environment help to create our current experience of home... and those experiences serve to... even revise the memory'. As Peled and Muzicant (2008) state, because the meaning of home is so often presented as such a positive and ideal concept in a person's life, it is difficult to accept that it might not have been so, in some respects.

Home, then, is a complex 'field of feelings and subjectivity' (Jacobs and Smith, 2008: 515); a memory rather than a place; home was, for many, rooted in selectively recalled memories of the past – of family and places – held in tension with present homes, and returned to in remembrance if not in reality. This suggests that the idea of home as a purely physical place is not enough; while house is a physical entity; home is a space of memory, meaning and relationships.

Gurney's (2000: 34) description of the home as an 'emotional warehouse' is pertinent here; a diverse range of emotions played out in the home are 'deposited, stored, and sorted' to 'create a powerful domestic geography, which in turn, sustains a complex and dynamic symbolism and meaning to...spaces'. In their reliance on memory as a means of finding (or returning) home, participants resembled exiles. Since it enabled participants to be transported home, memory served as a source of comfort (as the fairy lights did with Frankie) in times of disarray. Absent homes could thus be returned to through memory; and participants need not be in a place to connect to it (King, 2008), which offers some hope for the exile. At the same time, lost homes also haunted participants ('memories are ghosts that won't lie down'), stirring up feelings of grief because of the impossibility of actual return and when measured against current abodes which fell short.

5.3. Transience and Fixity

For many of the women in this study, their distant and more recent home histories were transient:

I stayed at my grandma's... I used to take it in turns. I used to give my mum a break and my dad a break. And not go back to my house, 'cause I knew what I'd do if I was there... just get loads to drink and drink it. So I used to go to my grandma's and auntie's and my other auntie's. I was, like, going round like a gypsy. I'd got wardrobes everywhere (Frankie).

...lived loads of places. I've lived nearly everywhere in Greencourt. I moved about... nearly twenty times I think (Gretel).

Growing up and that, mum moved us about quite a lot (Jenny).

Yeah, I been on streets, yeah. I was on streets for about six month. But then I was sofa surfing at me friends. And then I got a phone call one day... had to come in 'ere. I came in for me interview and a coupla month after, phoned me up saying I'd got a place 'ere. So it were alreet (Becky).

In the quotes above, participants described their housing histories as particularly transitory, having moved addresses many times, and lived with several people in a

range of living situations throughout their lives. During the troughs of her alcoholism, Frankie often stayed with relatives 'to give my mum and dad a break'; Gretel and Jenny had both moved frequently around the country with their families; and Becky (similarly to other participants in this study) had lived in a range of housing and homelessness situations, including rough sleeping, 'sofa surfing' and in hostel accommodation. Participants' lives had been transitory and mobile in terms of location as well as living situations.

In a home-centred culture, homelessness and transience are often conflated and written about negatively; to be homeless is not only to be without a home but to be without a stable sense of self-identity, as discussed at greater length in the introduction to this chapter. A person's past home life equates to their roots, which as Morley (2000: 33) argues, have been over-valued in society at the expense of mobility and transience: 'The over-valuation of home and roots has as its necessary correlative the suspicion of mobility'. Likewise, as Cresswell (1996: 85-87) observes, 'the definition of mobility as deviance derives from the positive valuation of roots in a place-bound, property-owning society, where mobility appears to be a kind of superdeviance...'

Participants often spoke about their transience, and the effect of transience, in largely negative terms:

I've just moved from pillar to post. I've lived everywhere, been everywhere, seen everything. Just... no good for me. Just wanna chill out now (Tori).

But 'cause I'm here and I've gone there, I've left everything again. So it's like I'm building it back up again. It's just... I'd just leave everything behind. Start again... every time. That's what messes me up (Tori).

Lucy: ...my mum lived everywhere; she can't keep in one spot.

Lindsey: What was it like, moving a lot?

Lucy: It's horrible 'cause you had to move all your stuff and pack all your stuff like you've got new stuff. And you had to move it all back into another house, or flat, whichever you're moving into (Lucy).

The lack of a sense of fixity in these women's past home lives was referred to as having a negative effect on the self: having to start from scratch in a new place was not only a practical inconvenience, it was exhausting and detrimental. It was implied that it was tiring and 'no good'. Tori and Lucy would be glad when they 'don't have to move again' and could just 'chill out'. However, when asked if moving about was difficult, Tori expressed an alternative view and an affinity with the transient; that transience and nomadism were parts of who she was, that she endeavoured to resist any fixed form of dwelling:

L: Did you find it difficult like moving about quite a lot?

T: Not really 'cause I'm just one of them people where I can wake up tomorrow and think 'right, I'm going'. I'll just go; I'll just leave everything behind. And probably come back... when I feel like it. It's why my mum won't give me a passport (Tori).

Tori's sense of home and identity is encompassed by the concept of nomadism. For nomads, home is always mobile; they are at once 'homeless' and home-ful; since the nomad lacks fixed ground or roots, home can be everywhere (Biernat-Webster, 2010). As Ahmed (1999: 338) argues, a nomadic consciousness refuses to belong in a particular place, and 'belongs instead to the globe as such'. Although Tori did not own a passport, her sense of belonging and home was not physically confined to one static place. Within the homelessness and meanings of home literature, it has been argued that the experiences that shape concepts of home are not necessarily situated in one place and in an idea of permanence. That is, the dualism of fixity equals home and transience equals homelessness is not a given (Radley *et al*, 2006; Johnsen *et al*, 2008; Sheehan, 2010). In reference to the figure of the American 'hobo', Moon (1996) points out that they do not feel home-less because 'house' is a building whereas 'home' is an attitude, and as such, home can be carried with a person.

Portable Homes

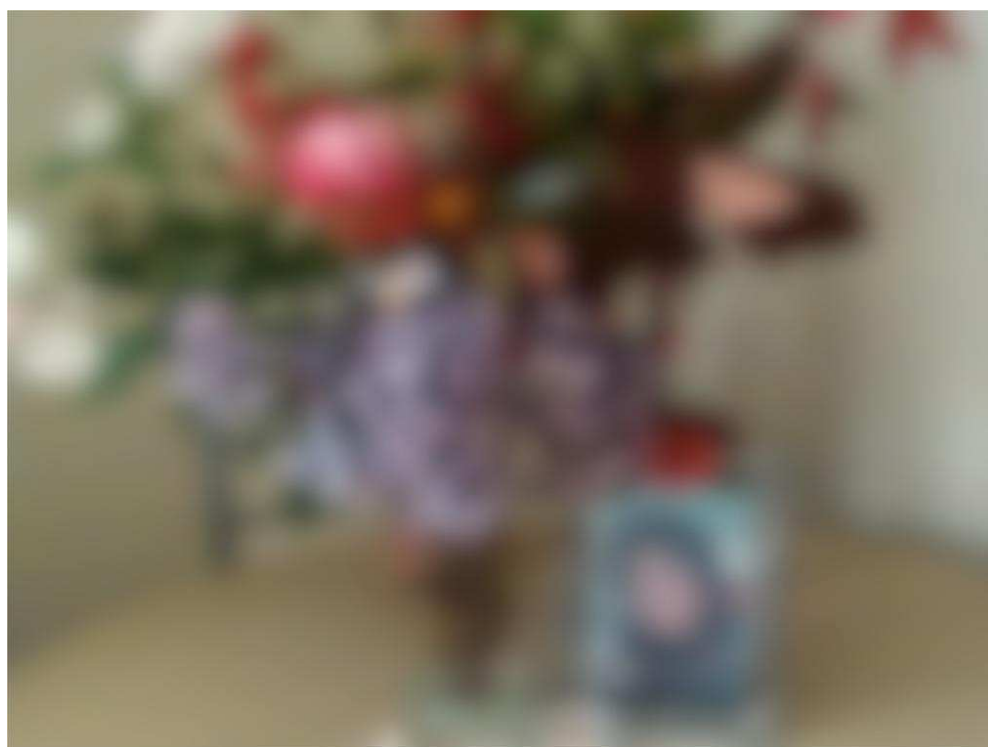
Also in-fitting with this narrative is the idea of 'portable homes', the notion that a sense of home travelled with participants as the house was left behind. Specifically, home and a sense of self were found to be imbued in a variety of the women's possessions: mementos, or objects, with a relation to the past that had travelled

with the women through their homeless pathways. Such possessions helped homeless women cope with current circumstances and restore and maintain their sense of self, through allowing a sense of home to be carried with them despite their loss of house. And if home is indeed portable, then it can be maintained in the context of transience, homelessness and mobility. Home was much more than a physical place; it was a space of emotion and memory. As such, when 'homeless', the women re-built (or built for the first time) a sense of home, and carrying meaningful objects with them along their homelessness pathways was one way in which this was achieved.

Participants maintained possessions that had symbolic or sentimental value for them, the most prominent being photographs of family members, as shown in *Figures 2 and 3*:



My mum again when feeling
low my mum always shows
a positive sense of energy,
love you mum xxx 😊



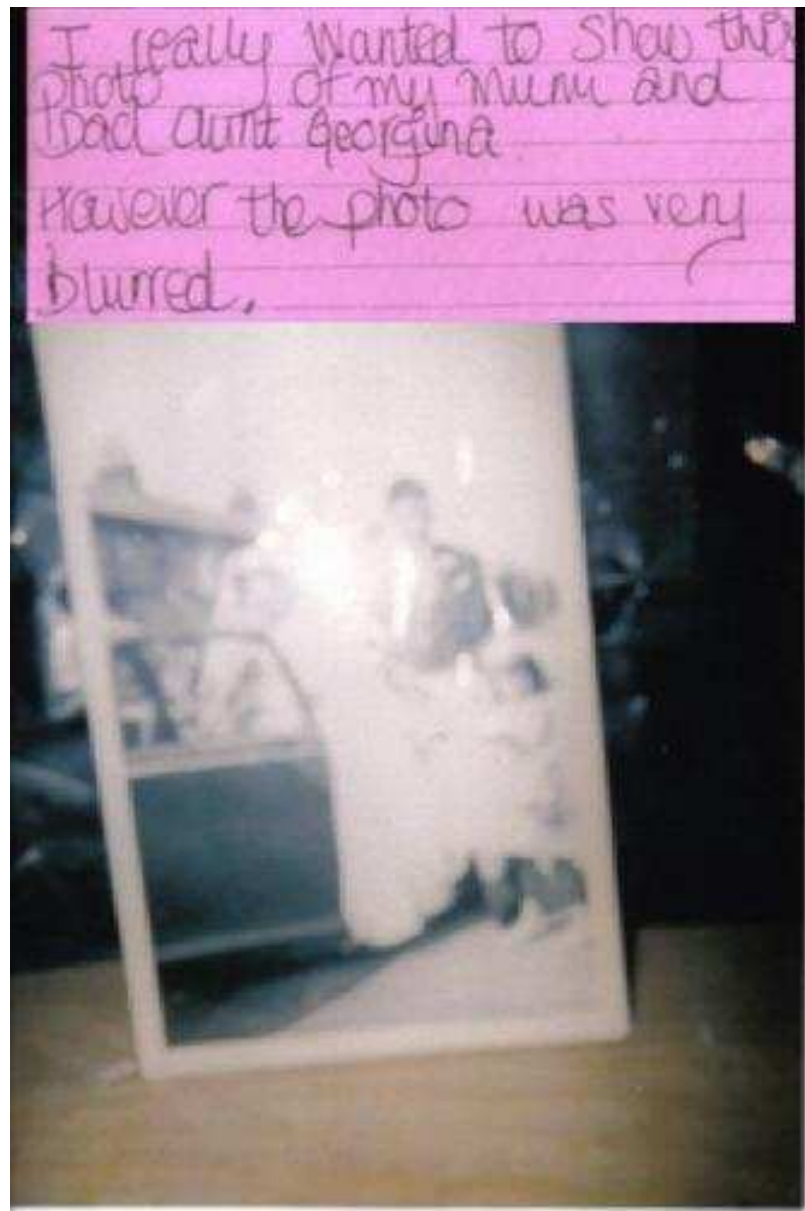


Figure 2: Photographs by Frankie (blurred for anonymity)



Figure 3: Photograph by Katie

Frankie's photographs in *Figure 2* portray her departed mother, surrounded by displays of flowers and candles; as well as a picture from her mother and father's wedding day. Echoing Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981: 69) assertion, Frankie's photographs of her late mother seemed to 'acquire an almost mystical identification with the deceased person'. Describing the photograph of her mother and father's wedding, Frankie said:

I always like to see my mum and dad together. So when I get up in a morning, I say 'Morning mum, morning dad! I hope you're looking after my dad, mum'. I always say that, I always talk to my mum (Frankie).

Frankie's photographs of her mother resembled a kind of shrine, surrounded by items symbolising her mother's past existence. Photographs, for Frankie, then, helped to preserve a tenuous immortality to her mother, maintain Frankie's identity as a daughter and bring a sense of the familiar and homely into the unfamiliar space of temporary supported accommodation. Similarly, Katie's photograph depicted the walls of her room in the hostel, which were decorated with photographs of her children who she had little contact with at the time. Referring to this picture, Katie said:

...other than my kids' pictures, 'owt else can come and go (1).

So youngest is going up for adoption. Oldest is with his dad. Erm, I can only see him three times a year... four times a year, sorry. Erm, I'm not allowed to buy him presents or owt unless it's birthdays or Christmases 'cause there's other... he's got two other kids living with him (2).

I think I'm gonna have to start looking for properties... 'cause we're querying... obviously, my youngest son, to stay with my cousin then me fight for him back and obviously I'm gonna have to have a place for that... Robert. Whereas Chris will stay with his dad and I'll only see him four times a year until his dad says otherwise... which.... we don't get on so I won't hold my breath. And stuff like that, so, yeah, I have got to prioritise. As much as I love it 'ere, I love my kids more, d'you know what I mean? (3)

In a similar vein, Jo expressed how she kept photographs of her niece and nephew on her walls, which produced an almost cathartic effect when she was feeling low:

I have, erm, pictures of my niece and nephew, and pictures that my niece and nephew have done for me. And they're my... like when I'm feeling a bit down and I think 'oh I could do summat stupid'... I look at them and that fetches me round (Jo).

As well as linking to present and non-present beloved family members, photographs also acted as a means of upholding a sense of self and home in unfamiliar and new surroundings and situations. In Frankie's case, it transported her back to a past when her mother was alive and well; and for Katie, an imagined future when her kids might be back with her. For Jo, photographs of family were particularly helpful in times of emotional distress, to escape and relieve stress. Photographs or possessions that extended the home and the family (the familiar/comforting) into the institutional-like hostel accommodation or the short-termism of temporary accommodation helped to stabilise the self in the face of more unsettled and transitory life periods.

Other mementos included possessions that had come with the women from past homes, or had been given to them by someone close to them. Frankie described a candle, which was a gift from Lourdes given to her by her father, and a poppy that belonged to her mother:

The candle's always precious. My dad gave me that, that's from Lourdes... I didn't want to burn it anymore because I didn't want to ruin it (1).

The poppy... that's always been my mum's, that's always been on there (2).



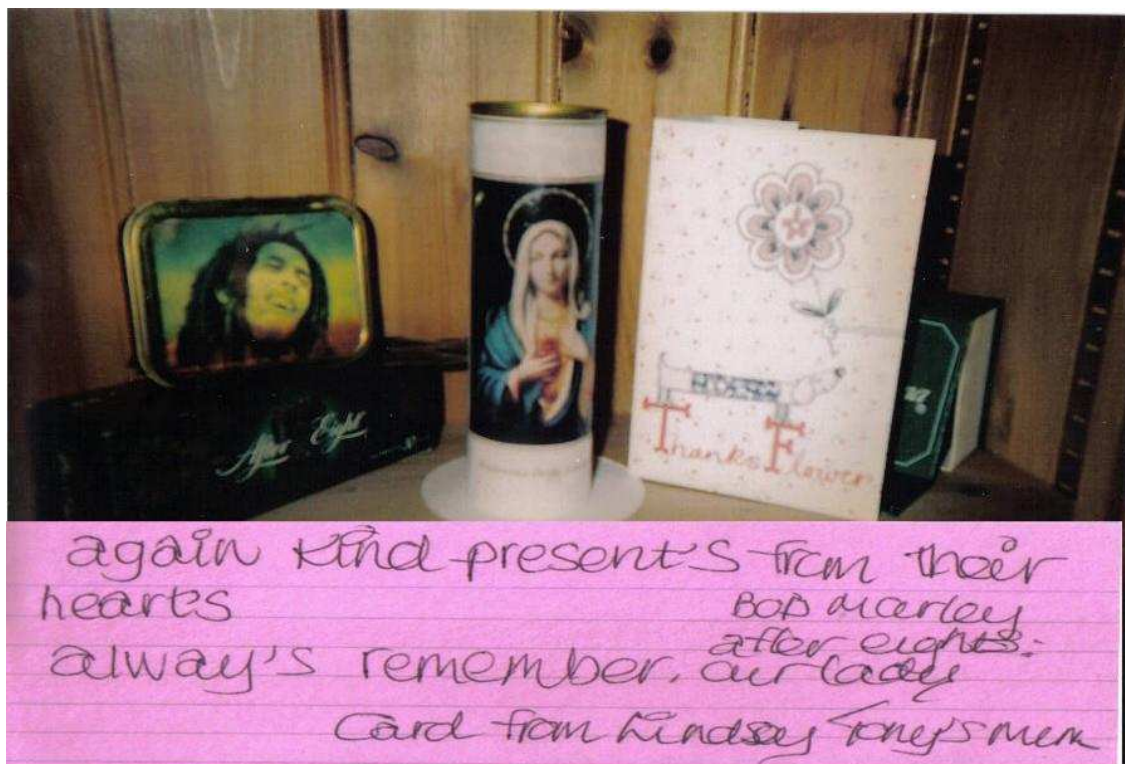


Figure 4: Photographs by Frankie (blurred for anonymity)

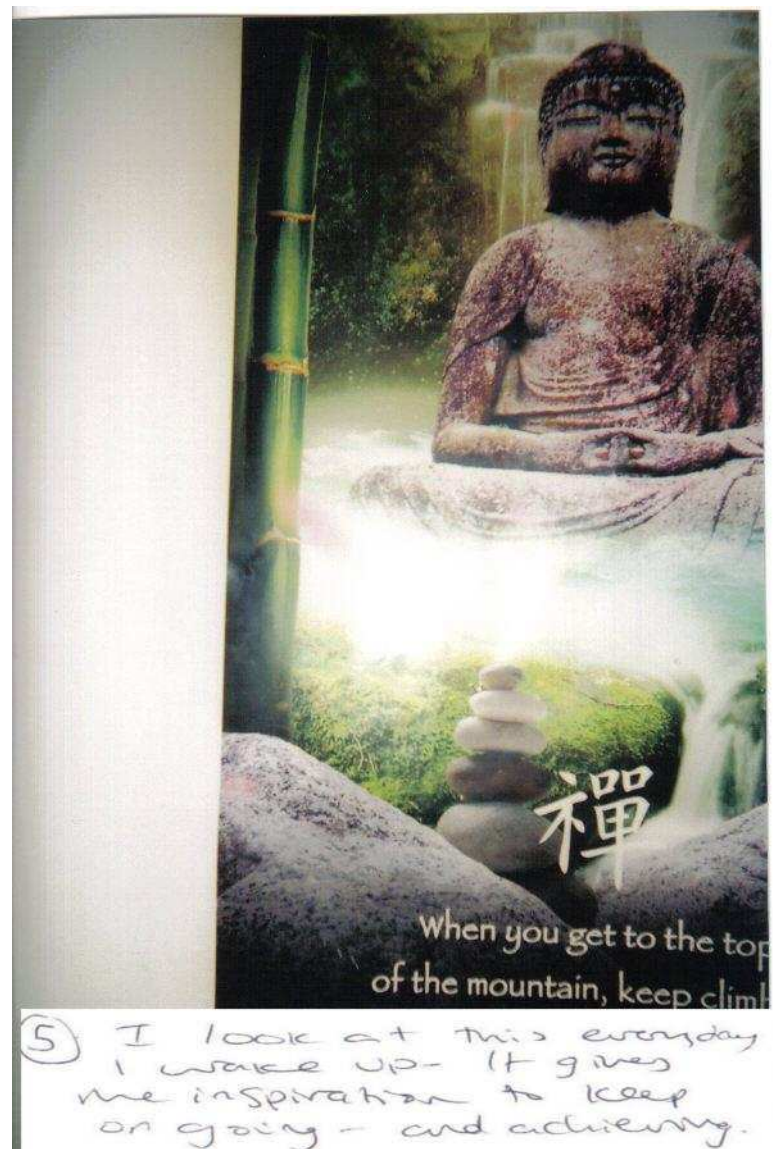


Figure 5: Photograph by Jenny

The candle and the poppy were 'precious' objects from the past, which would be kept indefinitely by Frankie: she no longer burned the candle to hang on to it for as long as possible, just as her mum's poppy had always been there. Following Belk (1988), possessions of the deceased are powerful remains of the deceased person's extended self. As Belk (1988: 148) contends, a sense of past is vital in managing identities, and 'possessions are a convenient means of storing the memories and feelings that attach our sense of past'.

Jenny described the poster (Figure 5) brought from home. As well as offering motivation, looking at the poster brought back memories of past family home life for Jenny, notably of her younger sister mischievously cutting off its corner. At this

point in time, Jenny still lived at 'home' and looking at the poster reminded her of this period in her life, transporting her back there:

It's the poster I have on my wall. Err, I wake up every day and it's facing me and I just read it every day. It's: 'when you get to the top of the mountain, keep on climbing'. And to me that's... it gives me that motivation and that strength, you know, it's like... yeah, don't give up, keep going, you know, you can still achieve... even if you felt like you got there, you know, you can still do more, you know, just keep on going and that's why I took a picture of that, because I feel like that's a part of me, I do like to... I think it's uplifting and I use that and it helps me... I use it to help other people as well, you know. But there, it's been cut a little bit... my little sister did it. So I look at that as well and I think, 'aww, little bugger' [laughs]. She did that when I was back at home (Jenny).

When asked which possessions she had kept with her throughout her moving from place to place, Leah replied:

Erm, my teddy bear [laughs]... That and I've got like a memory box with all my pictures, like things that meant a lot to me, like tickets and stuff... It's like a Prada box from perfume... it's full of all my stuff (Leah).

As Belk (1988) notes, we are more likely to hang onto possessions associated with pleasant memories, such as 'things that mean a lot to us', tickets from enjoyable gigs, teddy bears from childhood. Anchors of home and self in the past were especially important to homeless women where transient housing histories or moving from place to place was common; this anchorage was found in material objects.

Jo managed her anxiety, felt most acutely in public spaces, by reading a book: 'Like getting on a bus... I take a book with me, so I can just hide in the book. And I don't have to look at everybody around me. That's the way I manage things'. There is an element here of bridging gaps between public and private spaces, making the public more familiar through use of an object associated with private space, as well as echoing Hodgetts *et al's* (2010: 287) assertion that 'in situations of homelessness, portable possessions become particularly significant in building links between self and place' and Mallett's (2004) contention that 'home' is not

necessarily a domestic setting but 'a space in which everyday practices relating to the self and self-care are enacted' (Hodgetts *et al*, 2010: 288).

This section has shown how participants' lives and housing histories have been transitory, and as such, they deviated from the normative associations of home with roots and stability. While this transience was spoken about as having a detrimental effect on the self for some, for others (for instance, Tori), it was part of life and a part of who they were: 'I'm just one of them people where I can wake up tomorrow and think 'right, I'm going''. It has also shown how *home* is transitory and portable, as participants' possessions were invested with emotion, memory and a sense of homeliness that could be transported into 'homeless' spaces. As later sections illustrate, a sense of home can be felt in temporary 'homeless' accommodation (transience) while home-lessness can be felt in a permanent house (fixity); home can transcend a dependence on place, at least a *fixed place*.

5.4. The Un-Homely

This section turns to Bella to provide an example of home-lessness; it shows that for some participants in this study, home was something neither felt nor experienced in their current or former accommodation. It became clear that Bella had felt home-less throughout her life, not just once she was officially classed as 'homeless' or entered homelessness services. What this section demonstrates, then, is that a feeling of home-lessness can affect the self if one loses a home-feeling or a sense of home, and that this does not necessarily entail a loss of house.

Bella

This section focuses on Bella (aged 22) to emphasise how a feeling of not-belonging and not-feeling-at-home seeped through her housing history, from being brought up in care to moving into various hostels, to moving into a council flat, where she currently lived with the support of a local voluntary charity, which provided support services to 'vulnerably housed' young people.

Bella traced a turbulent adolescence, characterised by movements from one place to another; different people leaving and entering her life; bad experiences of the educational system; and family disputes: 'my mum couldn't handle me 'cause I was a bit out of control and that'. At the age of 13, Bella's mother could no longer look after her, and she was placed under the care of Social Services for two years.

Bella's sense of home-lessness began long before she was officially defined as 'homeless'. Her roots began unravelling at her 'family home' occupied by her step-dad and the children of her mother and her new partner. At about this stage in her life, Bella began to feel an inexorable sense of abandonment, to the extent that she felt 'adopted':

...with my mum having, like, three extra kids with her new partner, I felt like I was adopted. I felt that I didn't belong in this family. Because I was like, she wasn't giving all her kids the same love as she was giving these other kids she'd got now. So... I felt like I was getting pushed out, I felt like I weren't wanted or 'owt. So I just started running away from home (Bella).

A strongly felt lack of love from her family, and her mother in particular, transformed the family home from the usual 'place we can escape to' (Thomas and Dittmar, 1995: 496) to a place Bella wanted to escape from. Given this early experience, it was not surprising that 'home' for Bella meant the presence of caring family members, and homelessness, the opposite:

L: Erm, next I was gonna ask, like in my work, I'm using the word 'homeless' but sort of questioning it, at the same time, and asking what it means to different people 'cause like I know there's like... it's a label in a way as well, and all the associations of it and stuff, and it means different things to different people, so I was gonna ask you what you thought, what you feel that the word means...

B: What, 'homeless'?

L: Yeah.

B: When you've got nowhere to go, and you've got no one to turn to, and you think that everyone's like abandoned you... especially when it comes to family.

L: What do you think would make it more like home for you?

B: Probably having my family round me but... I know it's not gonna happen because they've got their own kids, got their own lives. And that's only thing that upsets me because I reckon they've forgot all about me (Bella).

Here, Bella made comparisons not only between home and family, but between home and being remembered and valued in the eyes of that family; something wholly different from her troubled past. Bella could never feel 'at home', even now, until she felt like part of a family again: 'it would feel more like home if I had my family round me but... it won't happen 'cause they've got their own lives'. Bella's feelings were reminiscent of what Berger (1974: 56) describes as the 'double pain of absence', because while she missed what was absent (her family), that which was absent continued without her: 'they've got their own lives'.

Since home for Bella equated to family, home-lessness was understood as feelings of abandonment, exclusion and alienation. Yet, the inverse was also true: that for Bella, 'home' was remembered not as the blissful, private shelter of popular imagination and myth, but as the un-homely. This standpoint strikes a chord with Freud's (1985) [1919] concept of 'Das Unheimlich' (translated into English as 'The Uncanny'). Royle defines the uncanny as:

...a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar. It can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context, or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context. It can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home (2003: 1).

Focusing on the semantics, unheimlich is the negation of the word, heimlich, rooted in the word Heim, or home. Yet, as scholars (Masschelein, 2003; Royle, 2003) have pointed out, heimlich (or homely) has two meanings. The first is bound up with the domestic, the familiar, and the intimate. The second contains the more negative sense of 'home': the dystopic, hidden, secret, clandestine, furtive, in that the walls of the house conceal its interior, excluding the outsider from its seclusion, its inner-circle. As such, the unheimlich can be used as a frame of reference for considering the struggle for domestic security on the one hand and home-lessness on the other, 'at the same time, revealing the fundamental complicity between the two' as Vidler (1992: 12) states. As Svenaeus posits:

...the two meanings of "homelike" and "secret" were combined in "heimlich", rendering it an ambivalent concept, or, if you will, a concept allowing two different perspectives: what is at home for me is strange and unknown to you who are not allowed into my house (1999: 240).

Although Bella longed for a sense of home or heimlich (having her family round her), she concurrently felt this as the source of her alienation and exclusion, her *unheimlich*: 'And that's only thing that upsets me because I reckon they've forgot all about me'. Here this differed slightly from the interpretation above by Svenaeus (1999), in that what was home for Bella was also strange and unknown to her.

It was not only with family that Bella had experienced emotional pain. Her past relationships with men were violent and abusive: 'my relationships are not that good, to be honest, when it comes to men. Been used too many times. Erm, I was violently abused by one of 'em'. In this sense, home for Bella was about much more than a roof over her head; it was a space in which she could feel safe, loved, and valued, something which she had never fully experienced. In the sense that Bella had never felt a sense of home, her home-lessness was more about a sense of absence of home rather than its loss. Bella explicitly attributed a sense of feeling home-less to the period she spent in hostel accommodation, but she still linked this feeling to the absence of family, or not receiving any visits from them:

L: And, like, when you were in hostels and stuff, did you see yourself as sort of fitting that description? Would you identify with that word or not?

B: Well, to be honest, when I was living in hostel, I didn't really have hardly no family come to see me so I'd say I was like similar. I'd say similar in that category. 'Cause I had no family coming to see me or 'owt so... the only time I did have someone come and see me was my mam when she turned up or whenever she came to Greencourt (Bella).

There was also much more about hostel life that prevented any sense of 'hominess' for Bella, including the smell of drugs, the 'racket' which interrupted sleep, the tensions between clashing personalities, and the intrusions of strangers: 'They just come 'ere and make loads of noise and then they end up doing one when time's up and they end up leaving'. Bella recalled one particular incident:

In one of hostels, I just kept me sen [myself] to me sen, and then, I nearly ended up getting into a fight in a different hostel, errr... but in end, it didn't end up coming to that, 'cause I ended up reporting it and that. Erm, and then I ended up getting that person banned off of site and that. But end of it, she ended up making up with me and apologising and that lot. Well, I didn't say it, but I was thinking in my head, 'yeah, you will apologise'. 'Cause I ain't taking no shit from no one, especially when it's me who's living in that place, not them. So, that's how I looked at it because they didn't really care... (Bella).

According to McCracken (1989: 179), a sense of home helps 'the individual to mediate his or her relationship with the larger world'. Bella's interactions with the wider world were purposely limited and insular: 'I just sort of keep me sen to me sen. But it's like trouble what comes to me. So... just stay away from it as much as I can, to be honest'. There were no direct references that tied this insulation with not feeling at home; just to 'trouble in the past', which likely included the above incident in a hostel which felt far from 'homely'.

For the past year, Bella had been living in a council flat about ten minutes' walk from the town centre. Since moving out of foster care, and subsequent homeless hostels, this marked the first time that Bella had lived largely independently. But even here, with potentially more control over her living quarters, Bella still did not view her flat as home:

L: Erm, where do you consider home, or what do you consider to be home?

B: Pfft. Don't really know, to be honest. 'Cause it feels weird living in them flats, because it's been my first time that I've ever had a council place. Always been... I've been in bloody hostels most of my life. Well, I can't say that because I've been in foster care. Well, most of my teens I've been in hostels. But, erm, to be honest, I don't really know. Erm, don't think I've got to that stage yet. I don't know which place to call home at the minute. Erm, probably one day... probably one day I'll probably end up calling it home. But not at the minute (Bella).

Bella spoke of a sense of surveillance and paranoia she felt in the flat, which undermined any sense of privacy and comfort: 'Erm, I was really paranoid when I moved in. Erm, 'cause people who live in them flats, keep telling me that I've, err, I'm living in murderer's flat and all this lot'. Bella was referring to a recent murder case – a fatal stabbing attack – that appeared in the news, and took place at the

local park. When Bella moved in, there were rumours that she was occupying the murderer's ex-flat:

Erm, not just that, I had like written, erm, words all over my walls, all over my fire place, all over my balcony... erm, and every time I used to go to, when I tried to go to sleep, it felt like I could hear people or hear someone, drag something across floor (Bella).

As Bella later discovered, these rumours were false and the invading thoughts eventually receded. But at the time, especially when on her own, at night, they were chillingly real, materialising in imagined ghostly presences and hauntings. Also connected with the murder case, Bella mentioned having to put up with reporters trying to elicit information about the suspect:

I had these journalists as well, erm, 'did you know her that murdered that 13 year old?' I was like 'Listen, if you don't do one, yeah, I'll make sure you will do one' kind of thing, right. And I got really angry and I ended up slamming my phone down. Because what they do, right, they'd been ringing every floor in my flat, the block of flats what I'm in. So I was like... so I ended up reporting them, I said 'Listen...' I goes 'Can you shift these people away from my flat? Because they keep ringing my buzzer' I goes 'I've had a six foot tall lad, well man, at the door'. Fuckin' scared crap outta me because of how tall he was. Because I thought he might have been a workman from council or something. But he wasn't. It was someone from frigging... erm, is it CCTV? Not CCVT. TV people... news reporter, that's it. And I was like, 'I don't even know who this bird is, so you just go'. And then there was another person who came. And I was like 'bugger off'. 'Cause I don't know 'em, don't know who they're on about. I said 'If you don't f... off, frigging... you will be removed'. And then I slammed my buzzer down 'cause it was all frigging getting to me and that (Bella).

Bella recalled her feelings of anger at receiving unwanted telephone calls from reporters, the constant ringing of her buzzer, and cold callers. The intrusion by real and imaginary others into Bella's flat signalled a loss of control over her own space, rendering homeliness impossible. Bella's situation here reflects what Bennett (2011: 960) describes as being 'homeless at home'. Bennett writes that the porous boundaries of 'home' allow for the policies, practices and attitudes of powerful others to seep into home life, affecting how home is felt by residents and 'affecting homelessness' (2011: 981).

Here, the literature on diaspora is also useful in providing a lens through which to understand Bella's feelings of home-lessness and the 'double displacement' (Choi, 2012: 2), which occurred as a result of moving away from the initial (family) home (first displacement) as well as the estrangement felt in the new home (second displacement). Although 'diaspora' usually refers to people who have migrated across countries' borders, it can be reapplied to those who have undergone similar displacements within their own countries, and in this case, within their own dwellings: of not being at home in one's home³.

Home-lessness, for Bella, was something which she experienced and 'felt' at ongoing points throughout her post-adolescent life, not simply when she was officially deemed as such by the local authority. Her meaning of home was rooted in the emotional and affective, namely close, loving family relations; something which Bella found lacking. This finding concurs with Robinson's (2005: 52) assertion of how grief over 'home experiences' continues to shape the lived experiences of homelessness: 'grief over past home experiences was lived in terms of the continuing negative relationships with new homes they established'. An absence of family, and consequently 'home', affected Bella in her most recent council accommodation, her time spent at the homeless hostel, and even in the 'family' home itself. Similar to observations made by Wardhaugh (1999: 93), that "being at home' is an unselfconscious and taken-for-granted state: to be homeless brings with it an awareness of absence', Bella resolutely *felt* home-lessness as a lack, and this stemmed from within the family home itself.

This sense of feeling 'homeless at home' breaks down distinctions between the home/homeless binary, confirming that a person does not need to be *house-less* to feel home-less. As well as being characteristic of the diasporic, Bella's experiences of home are also reflected in Bauman's (1995) notion of homesickness, as an absence of belonging. Differing from Frankie's nostalgic yearnings for a home in the past, Bella's home was always a dream, and was thus located in the future tense. Given that Bella quickly dismissed an attainment of home, it can be argued

³ 'Diaspora' has been used both as a descriptive tool (Safran, 1991; Cohen, 1997) as well as a social process (Hall, 1992; Clifford, 1999). However, both seem to converge in understanding the term as those who exist outside of or on the margins of the home-space.

that home was as unrealisable for Bella whose home was absent – the homesick – as it was for Frankie whose home was lost – the exile:

But in my future, I've always dreamed of like having my own house, but it being my own, not like rented or whatever, my own house. Or me being the buyer of that property. And having a swimming pool built into the house, and having like game rooms and stuff and then... erm... having a swimming pool outside... trampoline and that. Erm, and then, whoever I'm talking to in my family comes to that. Get all them round and hopefully I would've had kids of my own by then. And then all nieces and nephews could play together. That's about it I reckon (Bella).

In the above quote, Bella referred to the possibility of having a home and a family in the same breath as having a house with a swimming pool and games rooms, the former being as distant as the latter for Bella: 'it would feel more like home if I had my family round me but... it won't happen. 'Cause they've got their own lives so...'

Nonetheless, one does not necessarily have to possess a sense of home to have a sense of selfhood and agency. Rather than anchoring a sense of identity, community and belonging as much of the literature on home suggests (Casey, 2001; Easthope, 2004), Bella's 'home(s)' acted to structure her feelings of isolation and abandonment. However, Bella still resisted a passive 'homeless identity' (and 'the passivity expected of social victims' (Wardhaugh, 1999: 106)) by asserting her own identity in various other ways. Although Bella exists outside of the normative boundaries of home, family, and domesticity, she began to find her own place in the world in spite of her home-lessness. After leaving care, Bella moved into a hostel and started a few courses at college, meeting new people there. She is now in the process of looking for a voluntary position working with children, something she has always aspired to do:

Erm, err, and then when I did eventually get on my own two feet, from all that lot, erm, I came outta foster care when I was 15, I came out. And then, when I was, think I was about 16/17, I went to hostel. Erm, they took me on trying to sort my life out and that lot. Then I started going to college. Erm, started doing a few courses there. Erm, started to meet new people and that (1).

Erm, but now I'm looking for something like I've had more experience but what I'm looking for is to like work with kids and that. Because I'm always round my sister's kids and that. Erm, my sister's told me that I'm good with kids and that so... erm, I'm trying to look for a job working with kids and that. But going through voluntary first because my key worker's trying to help me. Erm, to kind of like get voluntary work and that. Erm, and if, and if they're happy with me, hopefully they'll take me on because some places do (2).

Bella did not passively accept her fate or simply admit acquiescence or submission to her situation. On occasions, Bella engaged with political issues, and expressed anger towards the current cuts to local services being carried out by the government:

L: Then I wanted to ask, like you being a woman in this housing situation, do you think that there's enough support services for women, specifically for women?

B: No. No I don't think there is because I used to go to StreetScene, down road, and bloody council's closed it down. And it's ridiculous. A lot of women who need help and support and everything, used to go there for help. And now council have closed them down, they've cut the funding down, what they used to get as well, for women who used to go there, 'cause they used to take us out on trips and that lot (1).

I keep getting this bloody post through my letter box, frigging, 'you've gotta vote'. And all this crap. I'm like 'I ain't voting for no f...' No chance. And then next minute I've got someone knocking on my door. I'm not expecting no one. It ended up being, erm, someone about voting. And my head's telling me 'Bella, calm down'. So I'm like 'There's no way I'm voting for no one'. What have they done, they've only put in like... that's another thing I'm wound up about... to be honest... is this government. By frigging charging people who can't frigging afford. Bloody second bedroom, it's bloody ridiculous to be honest with you (2).

What helped Bella hold onto her sense of self was her understanding that her own reality was not a given; that there was not enough support for 'vulnerable' women; and she vented her anger about this powerfully. Furthermore, while Bella felt an overwhelming sense of home-lessness in her various accommodations, she did find particular places in which she felt safe, at ease and connected with key support workers:

I used to be on a course at StreetScene, 'cause I made my own dress... a woman used to come in, all the way from London, bless her, all way from there. To sit down as a group, round table, and we'd be on like a sewing machine, and it was for, like, a fashion show. And that was done through StreetScene. They even paid for our hair to be done, everything (Bella).

That Bella asserted her identity despite feeling home-less subverted normative meanings of home and undermined the construction of 'home' as a source of identity. While Bella's experiences of her past 'homes' may have shaped her later feelings of home-lessness, or as Robinson (2005: 49) phrases it 'a sense of complete bereavement of a place in the world', she has, in some small ways, managed to begin a process of finding her own place to belong and carving out her identity in the world, irrespective of having a home or not.

This section has shown that home is not always what we think it is: rather than being a place of comfort and familiarity, it also contains strangeness and lack. It has shown that houses can harbour feelings of home-lessness which begin long before official 'homelessness' sets in and home-lessness can affect the self without a loss of house; but that even for Bella, who lacked a sense of home in the long-term, there is hope of creating alternative homely spaces where a re-negotiated sense of self and agency can be carved out.

5.5. Transitions: Developing New Meanings of Home

This section moves on from the un-homely to explore how normative constructions of home were resisted, and new ones re-created. By focusing on two participants, Danni and Jenny, this section offers a contrast to Bella's sense of home-lessness. Both participants created, albeit in different ways, home, or a sense of home, in the homeless hostel where they both resided. This suggests that new meanings of home are forged in spaces away from the normative domestic house; that 'home' does not have to be a house; and that 'homeless' women create homes in non-domestic, non-normative spaces.

Danni

First, the focus is placed on the perspective of Danni, a 21-year-old woman, who at the time of interviewing, was residing in a hostel for young homeless adults between the ages of 16 and 25 years. Danni's story is of interest because of her recreation of home in the hostel, and thus her subversion of normative versions of 'home'. Danni's pathway into the hostel involved moving from house to house, 'getting in trouble all the time', and developing a dependency on drugs (Amphetamines) and alcohol. This pathway culminated in Danni being rushed to hospital to have her stomach pumped after taking an overdose 'because it got too bad'. Afterwards, Danni moved back in with her mother temporarily before moving back in with her boyfriend until 'we had an argument and I ended up moving about from Marshwall to Aldrose to Silvermill to Woodvale'. Eventually, Danni moved into the hostel after hearing about it from her ex-partner. At this point in her life, Danni positioned herself as a kind of rebel, causing trouble, arguing with her mother, running away from home: 'I used to have a really bad attitude as well'.

Danni was able to declare that she had a home in the hostel despite her official status as 'homeless':

L: And where would you describe as home?

D: This is my home. This is my home. I couldn't go anywhere without thinking of this place. This is all I've got for now. I wouldn't give it up. Not again. Got too many friends. It's family, it's how we are. So... this is... yeah, this is my home (Danni).

In this response, Danni resoundingly repeated, 'this is my home'. Danni had lived in the hostel once before, but left after moving in with her partner. When that did not work out ('...things didn't work with me and him... he turned into a drug addict again, 'cause he used to be a druggie'), Danni returned to the hostel, vowing to never 'give it up' again, accepting, or embracing even, that 'this is all I've got for now'. Danni strongly felt that she *belonged* in the hostel. Here were her friends who she considered 'family' (similar to Jo, Katie and Tori - see Section 5.7); her opportunities to gain support from staff, notably for anger issues; to practice her hobbies, such as dance; and to be herself in her own space. In contrast to other

participants (such as Jenny and Frankie) for whom the family house remained the 'real home', it was the anti-thesis for Danni. Danni felt most not-at-home at her mother's house due to lacking her own space and autonomy there:

L: And where would you feel most not-at-home?

D: It'd have to be back at my mum's, 'cause I visit my mum as well. I go to my mum's a lot. So every weekend I go to my mum's and it's uncomfortable because it's not my home. So I can't, you know, do my own thing. So that's just awkward (Danni).

In this way, Danni resisted both official definitions and public perceptions of what it meant to be 'homeless': that a woman can find a sense of home away from the traditional domestic spaces of the household, in the assumed 'non-home' of an institutional environment. 'At home' activities took place within the walls of the hostel, including 'looking out' for friends, socialising, and arguing:

I've got friends in 'ere, one of my best friends... She's, uh, she's 25 week pregnant. So she's having a girl, so I'm really excited for that. But, erm, we've had our few arguments as well. But what does us the most is we all live together. 'Cause we're all in same building, you know, and we all communicate with each other, and socialise and... I think we just like depart after a while you know, 'cause she's got a boyfriend and stuff. I don't see much of her, and plus she's got baby to think about. I don't really see her that much and then there's another one that I've just fell out with. She's in same situation, you know, she's got a... she's obviously having a baby but she doesn't have contact with dad, he's an idiot. And we just had an argument 'cause she owes me money and stuff and she's not willing to pay. So we've had an argument. But I've had a few ups and downs with some of 'em but we always talk... but it's just what we do, 'cause we all live together. So... it's basically a normal world... when you come here (Danni).

Since these 'at home' activities took place within the hostel, it felt like home for Danni, 'it's basically a normal world... when you come here'. Home for Danni was linked to friends (her 'family'), and thus a sense of intimacy, belonging and inclusion. She felt 'at home' because she felt accepted there. While Danni did not feel that she belonged at her mother's house, she had come to find a home in the hostel. In such a sense, Danni only began to experience some of the characteristics attached to 'home' once she had left both her parental home and the subsequent one she shared with her partner, and moved into the hostel. Her mother's home

was 'uncomfortable' because it was not hers; at the hostel Danni could decorate her room however she wanted it, in a way that expressed 'who she is', so that 'everybody knows who I am':

I've put, I've put, wrapping paper on it now. Leopard print and then put pictures back up... Everybody knows who I am. Especially if I wear leopard print. 'Cause my room's leopard print now (Danni).

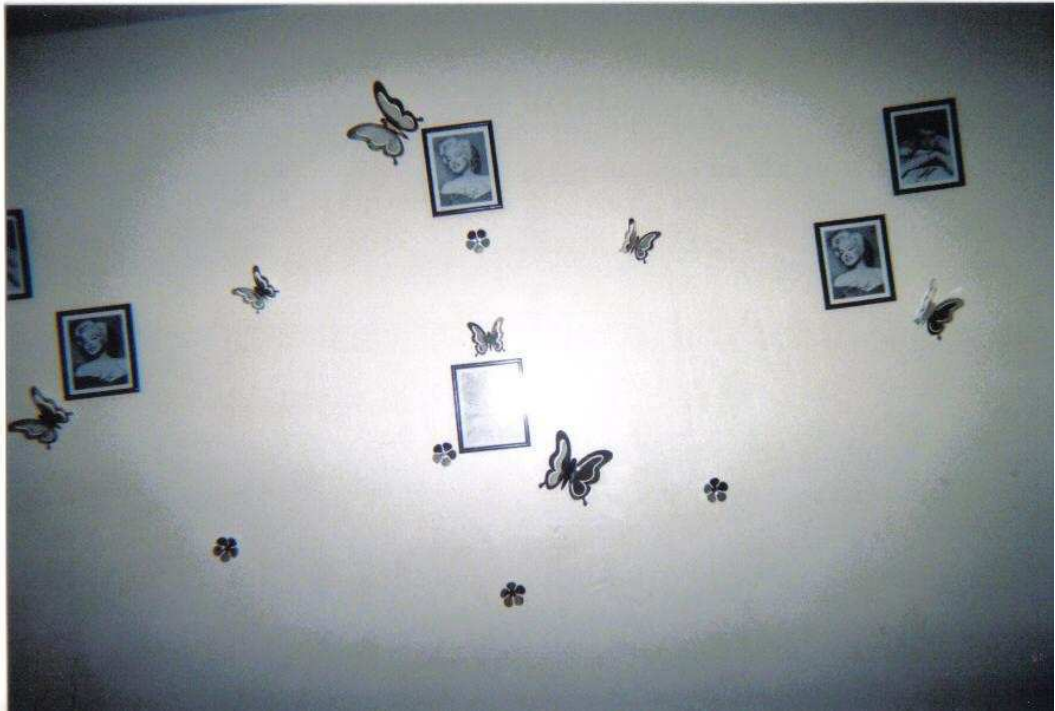


Figure 6: Photograph by Danni

Danni identified herself as a dancer: 'it's my favourite. I've always done dance, I've done it for you know, six years'. At the hostel, Danni received a 'Talent Bond', a small investment enabling her to develop her talents and aspirations, meaning she could further practice her hobby while living at the hostel:

I've just started... Urban Jokers I think it is... with Philip and I think it's Matt. I've been doing dancing with them... well with Philip. I had a talent bond and Philip came in to do it with me. So I've learnt some dance moves off him so I'm gonna learn residents. So hopefully I'll be doing a lot more dancing (Danni).

Even so, there were small reminders that Danni encountered, within the hostel, that brought back the reality of living in temporary accommodation, such as the

invading thought that she could not live at the hostel forever ('...but it'll not be my home for ages so...') and that she would, at some point in the future, be in the position of having to decide where to go next, or indeed, of having to find somewhere to live and belong all over again:

L: And where would you live?

D: I don't know, you see. My mum and my other family... none of my other family live in Greencourt so... I don't know but... I've got a lot of people round 'ere, I've got all my friends and stuff so I don't know. If I move back to my mum's end, am I gonna have the mates that I used to have and lose all these 'ere? Or am I gonna lose all these 'ere and not have friends down there, so I don't know. So it's a hard situation really. If I stick to Greencourt, I might still have my mates here but will I have... you know, I'm gonna be travelling to my mum's and stuff all time and I don't know... I can't decide yet. My family are wanting me to move back down. So... I don't know. I'm sure I'll think of something. Hopefully.... (Danni).

Danni's position as a 'young rebel' led to her literal 'homelessness', but also allowed her to create her own notion of home and freedom in the hostel where she carved out a space for her own identity, found support to develop her dancing skills and teach them to others. Akin to going to university, moving to the hostel from the parental home 'opened up new "private" spaces of identity' (Lincoln, 2012: 133) for Danni. While the home might still be thought of as a locus of identity, in no way does 'home' have to be thought of in the traditional sense of the domestic house.

Jenny

Discussion now moves on to focus on Jenny, a 20-year-old woman who, at the time of interviewing, was residing in the same hostel as Danni. Jenny also recreated home in the hostel, and her story added more depth and complexity to this process. While Jenny found home in the hostel to the extent of describing her enjoyment of hostel life as well as the homely characteristics it possessed, she did not go so far as to label it her 'real home', which she still saw as the parental home. Jenny's account suggested that strategies of recreating home elsewhere were not always straightforward; that notions of the normative domestic home seep into

and remain embedded in participants' perceptions to influence what they describe as 'home'.

Jenny moved into the hostel to avoid moving to Plymouth with her mother, which she said would disrupt her education (Jenny was studying at the time):

I just thought... 'cause I was at college before and I did erm, a Business course... after school... and I didn't pass my second year, I had to drop out because my mum got really poorly and erm I became a young carer. So I was doing a lot of like school runs and stuff for kids and I couldn't keep on top of my coursework and that. So I dropped out of that course which affected me 'cause I felt... like I felt a bit of a failure like... you know, 'cause I had a lot on. So I got onto this Health & Social Care course, absolutely love it, it's what I'm doing now. Erm, and then 'cause she wanted to move, I thought I don't wanna be dropping out again so I applied to live 'ere on my own, and got in (Jenny).

Prior to living in the hostel, Jenny was a young carer, looking after both her mother and her younger siblings, which took up much of her time and efforts. Trying to balance this role with her college work and social life was difficult for Jenny, and she felt pressured and constrained by these additional responsibilities and converging roles: as a young person on the one hand and responsible carer on the other. Jenny, for most of her upbringing, was raised by her mother; her dad being present until Jenny reached the age of four; and then her step-dad for a short period of time. Her housing history had been fairly transient and her life, at times, traumatic:

So err, thinking back, we lived in West Moor when I was born, here in Greencourt, and then she took me down to Somerset, spent time with my dad and family down there, and I lived there till I was about four... 'cause I remember leaving nursery at four, coming back up 'ere, lived in Baley for about four months... and then moved to Greyrose, I think after that for a couple of years, moved to Intake and that. Since Intake, I've been there up until March this year, and then I moved here so... (Jenny).

During the time spent residing with both her mother and step-father (between the ages of 12 and 13), Jenny lived in a situation of domestic violence, and witnessed her mother being abused at the hands of her step-father. Jenny's story resounds

with Robinson's (2005) findings which illustrate how step-parents dominated in young people's narratives of grief in their former home lives. As Jenny explained:

I never really felt emotionally or mentally unstable... err, until like my step-dad moved in. Things started to change. He was alright at first but erm, there was a lot of violence because he started drinking a lot of alcohol. He became an alcoholic, and he used to beat my mum up. So obviously I used to... I didn't like seeing that. I used to phone police all time. There were police in and out. Erm, kids were all in bed so that was alright. But I was a kid, you know what I mean? (Jenny).

It was around this time that Jenny was forced to take on added responsibility, almost an adult-like role at the young age of 12/13 ('I was a kid, you know what I mean?'): witnessing the violence; having to telephone the police; and dealing with the weight of this situation both mentally and emotionally. After her step-father left (or was 'eventually kicked out' by her mother), Jenny still had the responsibility of 'looking after the kids' and taking care of her mother: 'she had a lot of problems, she had a lot of issues. Erm, she was suffering from depression and stuff so...' It was this experience while growing up that Jenny cited as being formative of her current self-identity as a 'caring' person, inspiring her to enrol on a Health and Social Care course at college, and volunteer as part of the Young Carers Council in her local authority:

I think that was me being there stepping up to that responsibility... looking after kids when their step-father had gone, erm, it's kind of helped me go on to the course that I'm doing, Health and Social Care course so... and I was part of the Young Carers Council in Greencourt and... I was getting involved in all that kind of thing. So I loved all that... I think it's the kind of person I am, I'm really caring, I wanted to help others as well. So, yeah it's the experience I had growing up has made me want to do something like that in my career (Jenny).

Moving into the new space of the hostel signalled a major transition for Jenny, and at the time of interviewing, Jenny was still arguably in the early stages of the transition, having only being at the hostel for a period of approximately two months. At first, moving into this new environment was difficult and alien for Jenny:

L: How did it make you feel at first?

J: When I first moved here?

L: Yeah...

J: Erm, obviously a bit scared, living on my own (Jenny).

Later in the conversation, Jenny explained the isolation and loneliness felt in being surrounded by neighbours playing music – who knew each other but were still largely unknown to her:

Err, but 'cause I didn't know anyone in 'ere, I didn't like sleeping 'ere sometimes, it was like 'Hmm, it's too quiet'. You'd hear my neighbours playing music and stuff and you'd just be in middle like... you know, 'what do I do?' At first, kinda felt isolated and lonely as such, so I just used to call up my mum like 'what's happening?' and hear kids voices and stuff... my brothers and sisters and that, I was missing everyone at first, but I'm used to it now and that. So at first it was just a bit getting used to it, obviously being a little bit err lonely... a bit low. Did go through a stage actually at beginning where I was feeling really crap. But everything just got smoothly into place, there's more pros than cons in the end so... yeah, got used to it and I'm happy now (Jenny).

At this stage, when adjustments to a new and unfamiliar place and people were still being made, Jenny clung to her emotional attachment to the family home, making frequent telephone calls to her mother; enquiring as to what she might have missed; and listening to her brothers' and sisters' voices on the line. However, as time progressed (not much time in this case), Jenny reported how things moved 'smoothly into place', and gradually she began to feel settled and happy in the hostel, which came to take on a home-like quality for her. Once Jenny accepted the loss of her family home, a new phase dawned when new meanings of home began to emerge, as well as a positive change in self-identity; 'a revitalised sense of self' (Thompson, 2007: 44). As Jenny recalled:

Yeah, so yeah it's alright. It's fun. Erm, met a load of people. When I first moved in 'ere, like my family and my friends were like 'oh, you've changed a bit'. Like they were saying you're a bit more rebellious. But I didn't see myself as that. I don't think I've changed. But basically 'cause I was free... I felt free. I was going out a lot more and just enjoying me sen [myself] (Jenny).

Here, the hostel began to take on more home-like qualities than her parental home possessed, allowing Jenny to exercise a greater degree of power and autonomy, as

well as personal identity, which was denied in her family home, in much the same way as women's identities are often restricted within the home-space (Oakley, 1976):

Yeah, I think it was different because I felt held back. My mum never liked to say that, she used to say 'nothing's stopping you' but I kinda felt a bit guilty when I used to go out 'cause I thought 'it's not fair kids aren't going out'. You know what I mean? But obviously my mum's health has been an issue over last couple of years but... she's doing really well again so things are looking up for her which is great. So less pressure and stuff. But erm, I just need to have my time, I think, now. First I thought it was really selfish of me. But I thought I have gotta live, you know (Jenny).

This is congruent with the meanings of home literature, referenced in the introduction to this section, which links home with identity (Feldman, 1990; Case, 1996; Moore, 2000; Holloway and Hubbard, 2001; Easthope, 2004; Cresswell, 2004; Holloway *et al*, 2003; Jacobs and Smith, 2008). Yet, delving deeper into Jenny's own meanings of home, she nevertheless defined 'home' differently, seeing the hostel only as her own 'space', a 'bedroom', whereas her mother's house was a 'true home' or 'real home' (similar to Jo, as Section 5.7 illustrates). Thus Jenny did not link independence with a definition of 'home' *per se*, but rather with a *sense* of home, which she saw as being free from pressures and constraints:

L: Erm, and this is, err, kind of related but... where or what is home for you? Like what do you consider as home?

J: Erm, I would say my mum's home is a true home 'cause it's family. You're never alone, you've always got your brothers, your sisters, your mum, everyone you love are there; that's a home. Where there's cooked dinner and you know, where here, it's pot noodles. But yeah, I mean cooked dinner and erm, and just being around each other, even just sitting in front of the TV, you know, which is the opposite of what I do here, I don't sit in front of the TV, I'm always doing something else. So I'd call my mum's home a home because being around my family and the people I love but here I call it my own space, I wouldn't call it home. It's like a bedroom, it's like what I'd like at my mum's kind of thing. But I'd feel like I'd be isolating everyone (Jenny).

Here there is a distinction between the 'sense of home' and the 'real home', where the former refers to the qualities that participants really want from home, and the latter is what participants think 'home' should be which is based on normative associations of the domestic. Developing an alternative meaning of home was not

as straightforward for Jenny as it was for Danni. Although Jenny had carved out a new space in which to perform her identity without constraints, her actual experience did not reflect the symbolic meanings she associated with 'home' or her naming of it. At the same time, Jenny refused the definition of 'homeless', asserting that living in the hostel was a result of Jenny wanting her own space due to cramped living conditions at her family home, not because of what she described as any 'problem'. Although Jenny did not label the hostel as 'home', neither did she label herself as 'homeless', which goes against expectations that she would identify the hostel as home in order to reject the 'homelessness' label:

L: And how do you feel about the label of homelessness, the sort of associations it has and stuff?

J: Erm, a lot of people don't understand. Err, like the way they label it, they just think 'oh, druggies, or...' Like, as soon as I moved in, teachers at college were like 'Oh, I hear you're living at X Hostel. Have you had an argument with your mum?' and stuff. And it's like everyone just gets judged, like you're a spoilt brat or you've been abused or you've got all these arguments but... some people have in here but there's other people who just wanna move out 'cause they want their own space (1).

Everyone who doesn't know just think 'oh, there's a problem', they automatically think summat's happened at home. And it's like 'Hang on a minute, no, it's just a little overcrowded at home'. What's wrong with having my own little space? ...They just want that independence. They wanna be a bit free, they don't wanna be under strict restrictions with their parents and stuff, they just wanna live a little (2).

While the hostel took on home-like characteristics for Jenny, it could never quite be called her 'true' home. For young people, and indeed for young people in the non-normative space of the hostel, identity does not emanate from 'home' in a straightforward sense, not least because there are multiple types of 'home' to begin with. Just as Lincoln (2012) found that undergraduates considered both their parental and student accommodation to be home, so too did Jenny have more than one home sphere to derive her identity from. Simply because Jenny did not label the hostel as 'home', at this point, does not mean that no positives were gleaned from living there or that she did not see it as a kind of home: indeed, she felt more independent, autonomous, free from restrictions, and able to 'live a little'. The refusal to name the hostel as home (also true of other participants) might have

been more to do with participants not having the confidence to identify temporary supported accommodation as 'home' because it is not the norm and due to the social value attached to the domestic house, and the corresponding lack of value attached to homeless hostels.

There is an overlap here between Jenny hanging on to fragments of the family home as the 'real home' and Frankie's yearning for the familial home she was estranged from. Whereas the domestic house was similarly *named* as the 'real home' for both participants, where they differed went beyond the naming process. Whereas Frankie saw only the past domestic house as being representative of home and homeliness, Jenny nevertheless found homely characteristics in the non-normative home space of the hostel itself.

5.6. Homes away from (not) Home

Although the previous section illustrated how home was re-created in the hostel for some participants, others found it difficult to feel a sense of home there. And even when they did, their sense of home shifted (as discussion in Section 5.7 details) so that hostel life at once contained elements of home and un-home. For instance, Gretel referred to the hostel as 'ace' but at the same time called her room a 'kennel'. In negotiating their displacement from home as well as the shifting nature of it, a number of participants inhabited and frequented alternative spaces which they could escape to, and in which they found a sense of belonging and connection. These were spaces where they could 'feel happy' and relax with friends. While some participants did not have a place to call 'home' – like Tori who said home was 'nowhere' – they still found places in which they felt 'at home'. These places were retreats or 'homeplaces' (hooks, 1990) for many of the participants, a 'home away from home', or a 'home away from not-home'.

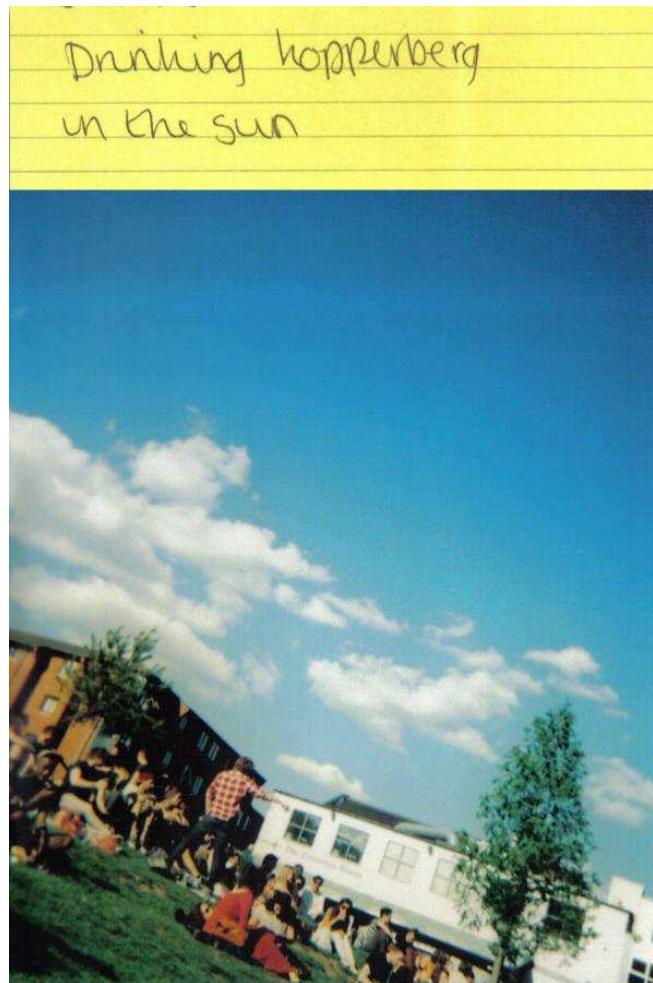


Figure 7: Photograph by Gretel

G: I just went to Millcliffe with my mate for summat to do 'cause it was sunny. And we went to that park. And took a crate of Kopperberg... I think it's just ace 'cause everyone... everyone just goes and sits and are all like like-minds I think. Dunno...

L: Is it somewhere you go quite often?

G: Yeah. I go to Millcliffe all time. I go to Millcliffe Park an' all (Gretel).

Gretel's 'therapeutic place' (Robinson, 2002: 144) was a park in Millcliffe, pictured above in *Figure 7*. This space was one in which Gretel could be around people she connected with, surrounded by people with like-minds, a contrast to how she saw the people in the hostel: 'Erm... oh, just... worst bit... only bad thing... like living 'ere is all idiots that live 'ere'. It was also a place to relax in the sun, to drink and let go, away from the rules and constraints in the hostel, where drinking in rooms was forbidden.

A number of participants reported that going for walks, and being surrounded by fields, trees and 'nature' was their form of coping with stress, finding inspiration, relaxing and thinking about things:

Yeah... yeah, 'cause like if I walk through fields, I don't know I just feel like the nature and stuff, the trees, I don't know what it is, yeah, it's kind of like inspiring sometimes and I just get things and they just come and yeah... pretty cool, it's pretty cool, and then you get a beat in your head and it makes it flow and yeah, that's pretty awesome (Jenny).

J: And I took these ones... the next... 'cause when I'm feeling stressed out, I go for walks. And it just relaxes me. So that's one of my walks that I did.

L: Is that nearby?

J: Yeah, it's round here, it's not far from here. And that's on my way back down to the hostel. But, yeah, that's what I do, I walk. I just go off on my own, don't listen to anybody and go for a walk.

L: Do you have the same route or do you kind of alter it?

J: I just walk. See where my feet end up. That's just my way of coping with things sometimes. Sometimes I shut myself in my room and won't answer to anybody but I think it's better to get outside, so I do tend to walk.

L: How long do you walk for, how far do you usually go?

J: I've walked two hours at a time. Just gone on this walk and just ended up on a mission. Just see where I end up (Jo).



Figure 8: Photograph by Tori

T: That one's me hiding in the trees.

L: Oh yeah, I didn't see you there.

[both laugh]

T: Love that one. That one I'm hiding in the trees. I'm unstoppable, no one can find me. [Laughs].

L: Is that a hobby of yours?

T: Yes... [laughs]. That is my hiding spot if I am ever on the run [laughs] (Tori).



Figure 9: Photograph by Jules

My favourite place to go... erm, I don't know, erm... well I do like...if I'm really stressed, or I need to think about something, I live in Westwood and there's a place in Lansell which isn't too far, and I go for a walk and I... it sounds really silly but I like to feed the horses. And that really like, it just relaxes me so... that's a place that I like to go when I need to relax. Most people say I like to go to the pub. [laughs]. But I say no, I like to go for walks, yeah (Jules).



Figure 10: Photograph by Jules

[Referring to *Figure 10*] This was actually, not far from where I live. Well, it's not my house, obviously I'm homeless, but I stay with my grandma. This was... it's just down the road. There's an old people's home but there's like a wood and a little river. And I normally, like if I'm stressed, I go for a run on there, or go for a walk on there. And I just thought it might be a nice place to take some photos. Erm, it doesn't really say anything about homeless women but...it's just somewhere that I like to go (Jules).

Jules had nowhere she could call home, at least not materially: 'Erm... well I haven't technically got a home. I live with my grandmother but I am actually homeless. So I haven't got a home at the moment that is classed as mine'; 'So I wouldn't say that I feel at home where I live now, no'. However, 'home' for Jules was a state of mind, a place where she 'feels happy' in herself, 'not stressed' and where she was able to exercise her creativity. Having spaces where she felt safe and happy, like those mentioned and depicted in the above quotes and photographs, was essential for Jules. Likewise, for Jo, who did not feel the hostel to be her home at all times ('I don't call it my home though, I call it my room. I don't call it my home, it's my room. Erm, my home... I ain't got one really. Not at the minute... I'd like one in the near future. But 'home' is somewhere... like here, you can be constantly on edge, expecting summat to happen. So you never relax'), her means of finding escape, solitude and relaxation was to 'go off on my own, don't listen to anybody and go for a walk'. Tori, whose home could not be found in the hostel but was 'nowhere', found 'hiding spots' where she could not be found, if she was 'ever on the run'.

Home was somewhere participants could 'be themselves' and this did not have to be a house, or a fixed space; but revolved around the particular atmosphere of various places which could foster certain emotional states, space for creativity, relaxation and escapism. Such places tended to resound with hook's (1990: 384) notion of 'homeplaces', 'the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination'. These were places participants could retreat to, and begin to reconfigure their thoughts, feelings and sense of belonging in the world. When physical dwellings did not suffice as home, as they often did not, participants sought the associations of home (relaxation, escape, belonging, and safety) outside the boundaries of bricks and mortar. In terms of defining home, this section further

deconstructs traditional notions of home as domestic dwelling and reaffirms the idea that home can be broadened to include not only 'homeless' or institutional spaces like the hostel, as the previous section showed, but outside spaces in which comfort and safety can be found.

5.7. Relational Homes/Relational Identities

Home has been theorised as a site that plays host to a variety of social relations, from the loving to the oppressive. Relationships can determine what makes a dwelling a 'home' or a 'prison': from dodging the watchful gaze of the neighbour and various forms of surveillance, to living in a situation of domestic violence and abuse. As Watson and Austerberry (1986) argue, home denotes particular social relations or activities within a physical structure. Olufemi (2002) sees home as a social concept, strongly linked to notions of family. According to Hayward (1977), many of the characteristics of home relate to identity and relationships, including home as a set of relationships to others, as a relationship with a wider social group and community, and as a relationship with one's parents and place of upbringing. Sixsmith (1986) summarises all these dimensions into what is termed 'the social mode of home', which consists of the type and quality of relationships with others.

Building on discussion from the previous section, which showed how home was found outside the walls of the physical dwelling, this section further illustrates how home is not confined to tangible or normative definitions. For the women in this study, feelings of home and home-lessness were interwoven with relationships. Although women's past relationships were damaged, new ones were reconstructed in the space of the hostel, and the very concept of home as familial, domestic space was turned on its head. Instead of looking inwards, the women in this research looked outwards and found a sense of home and self in others; how far this finding might be gendered and how it would compare with men would make an interesting line of enquiry for future study.

Home and identity for the women were, in this sense, deeply relational rather than solely intertwined with the self, or individualised. Here, relationships emerged as

an integral element of home, adding weight to the broader argument that social and interpersonal relationships are integral to identity construction (Lawler, 2008), as well as to the idea that home goes far beyond the physical structure. This allowed a sense of self to be maintained when houses were lost and women become 'homeless'.

The Un-Homely Family 'Home'

Just as Farrugia (2011) argued that an absence of family support means that young people are more susceptible to wider structural inequalities, so too had many of the women in this study become homeless due to a breakdown in familial relations. It has been made clear in this section that most of the women have had far from ideal past domestic lives and upbringings, which has had implications for how their present homes and identities were constructed when becoming 'homeless'. Yet, a sense of home-lessness, un-belonging and feeling 'homeless at home' (Bennett, 2011) goes much further back for some participants than their entry into homelessness accommodation and their presentation as 'homeless'; it can be traced back to roots in early relationships with family. This suggests that relationships play an integral part in structuring not only a sense of home but also its lack: home-lessness.

While Section 5.4 in this chapter has explored how the domestic home can be un-homely in a general sense, this section focuses specifically on how relationships made it so. The salience of interpersonal relationships to homeless women's identity emerged as a key finding in this research in two principal ways. First, for many participants, relationships emerged as one of the most salient aspects of how they identified themselves, as well as how they saw 'home'. Indeed, the majority of photographs to emerge from the auto-photography exercise depicted relationships in some form or other, which is a reflection of their significance in the women's lives.

Second, since relationships with biological family members were in most cases spoiled, severed or fraught with difficulties, participants *reconceptualised* what and who they saw as 'family' – often it would be made up of friends, carers, or staff at

the hostel. For these homeless women, dominant meanings of home and nuclear family were reconstructed. This newly reconstituted 'substitute' or 'do-it-yourself' (Duncan and Smith, 2006: 5) family was what many of the participants experienced as home, from which they derived a reconstructed sense of identity.

In many of the participants' accounts were stories of chaotic family backgrounds. Most had been separated from, run away from, or had been thrown out of 'homes' or families characterised by substance use, criminality, poverty, poor mental health, and abuse. As such, the normative values of safety, comfort, and security associated with the construct of home, house and the domestic sphere were not a feature of their past home lives. Tarnished past familial relations also lingered into the present, as some women remained estranged from certain family members. For instance, since Becky became addicted to drugs and moved into the hostel, she mentioned how her siblings would not see her anymore: 'won't have nowt to do with me'. Jo had a similar experience of losing contact with her family over the seven years that she was addicted to drugs and in an abusive relationship: 'I went seven years without speaking to 'em'. Other participants had absent fathers or volatile relationships with mothers. Fraught relationships were often closely linked to drug or alcohol abuse by a parent:

...my dad weren't really there and that so... my mother didn't let me get involved with him or 'owt or we weren't allowed to see him or anything. That's why both my sisters ended up leaving home (Bella).

Not really got a good relationship with my dad (Jenny).

I don't speak to my dad... my dad always sticks up for my brother and he's two year older than me (Katie).

Can't stand my dad. I could actually kill my dad and not feel bad about it (Leah).

...Lived with my mum for about 15 years in Middleton. And then I didn't get on with her... But we just used to argue all the time. And she's got a problem with drink (Leah).

...dad's just come from doing boxing, turning into a baghead and then... my mum's just a slag. I shouldn't say that but... that's what she is... don't like her, she causes trouble for me... Keep my distance as much as I can (Tori).

Other participants' accounts captured many typical elements of a troublesome home life. Bella (discussed in Section 5.4) felt a strong sense of abandonment by her family, especially when her mother settled down and had children with a new partner: '...it's like I didn't feel I was... belonged... in that family at all, to be honest. I was always getting treated differently, like, I don't know, like I was some adopted kid or summat'. Bella's childhood relationships impacted on the ones she formed in later life, as she attempted to find solace and belonging elsewhere. As a teenager, Bella formed new friendship networks, away from home and school:

I ended up staying with these foreign people 'cause I felt like... I felt like... like I was... like... it felt good because I know I was at a young age but... it felt really good because it felt like I was wanted by someone. To me, I know it might sound weird but to me it felt like they were more like my family than my own family is... it just felt that they were looking after me and that... (Bella).

Bella valued the company of this group because of the alternative they represented to the relationships she had with her biological family: what Bella discerned as feelings of belonging and care.

Abuse and violence also featured as part of some women's childhood relationships, as they navigated a world in which relationship violence was part of the normal routine. Katie had suffered abuse as a child, but still described her family life as 'normal', suggesting that difficulties, because they were routine and accustomed to, became seen as the 'norm': 'I just grew up in a normal family life, stuff like that. Yeah, I was abused as a child at some point'. Jenny had also lived with an abusive step-father, which was closely linked to his alcohol abuse.

Jenny also described reversing roles with her mother, caring for her, the home, and her siblings as her mother could not. Jenny noted, 'I became a young carer. So I was doing a lot of like school runs and stuff for kids and I couldn't keep on top of my coursework and that'.

Family tensions often led to participants leaving the family home, either running away, being abandoned or being thrown out:

Lindsey: You mentioned you don't see your mum anymore...

Lucy: No, she didn't want me since I was about 12 (Lucy).

...Go back into my mum's... err... she kicked me out again when I was 16 (Tori).

And then my mum couldn't handle me 'cause I was a bit out of control and that. So I got put into care (Bella).

Although some of the women's relationships with families remained poor, others had improved since they left home. Bella emphasised the importance of spending time with her nieces and nephews to make up for lost time after the breakdown of the relationship with her sister. Bella invested time and effort into 'going down to spend time with' her nieces and nephews, and described this as the most important thing for her to do, 'so that they know who I am when they get older', echoing Taylor's (1989: 36) assertion that 'one cannot be a self on one's own' and that identity is forged through interactive, comparative processes. Bella worried that if she lost touch with her sister again, due to another argument, then her nieces and nephews 'won't know who I am'. Relationships with other family members were also improving:

I see me mum whenever... and me and my sister are getting on better... so that's going quite well. I see me sister who lives in Erimoor, she comes down only when she can.... and me and me dad... he's like moved down towards me sister's end. So when I go down to my sister's I can see my dad while I'm down there as well so that's a bit better (Bella).

After not speaking to her family while on drugs, Jo had re-established contact with them since recovering from her addiction: 'I went seven years without speaking to 'em. And it's like 'oh my god, what were you thinking?!' Couldn't imagine them not being there now'. Leah was also on better terms with her mother: 'I'm getting closer with my mum. 'Cause I used to absolutely hate her. I only speak to her like once every few weeks... She like picks me up and takes me shopping and stuff like that'.

Unsettled home and family lives translated into later life for some women too. Some of the women were mothers themselves; though, their motherhood had

frequently been disrupted. Both Katie and Tori's children had been taken away from them at a time when their lives had been characterised by drug abuse and mental illness. Despite this separation, the women were eager to restore their statuses as 'good mothers', especially since they had experienced difficult childhoods themselves and did not want to repeat this for their children. Tori spoke of her role and identity as a mother as a reminder to keep on the 'straight and narrow' so she could be there for her son when he grows up:

I can just make it better. I don't want him knocking on my door in 20 years' time saying 'You were this, you were that, you were other', and I am stood at the door like that. I want him to knock on the door, and I've got a nice car and... he can say 'Well, she was an idiot but she's turned her life around... she does want me' (Tori).

Freud's (1985) (1919) analysis of *unheimlich* (*Uncanny*), introduced in Section 5.4, is useful again here. In his essay on the 'Uncanny', Freud (1919: 219) established a link between the *unheimlich* and concealment, referring to the 'Uncanny', or the *unheimlich*, as that which 'belongs to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror'. Morley (2000) posits that while the *heimlich* can paradoxically be seen as the realm of homeliness, of the tame, of intimacy, friendliness and comfort⁴, the second meaning of *heimlich* is that of concealment. *Heimlich* thus contains *unheimlich* because to conceal is the exact opposite of making familiar. In this sense, and as Steiner (2010: 134) notes, there is a constant vacillation between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the homely and the un-homely. In other words, the uncanny is located within the walls of the house and in the residue of family life; in what appears to be familiar, domestic, friendly settings lurks the feelings of home-lessness and dislocation.

As biological family life and parental 'homes' carried negative memories, new 'substitute' and 'do-it-yourself' (Duncan and Smith, 2006) families and home spaces were carved out within the officially labelled 'homeless' spaces of hostels and day centres, where friends and support workers took on familial roles and positionings. Although several domestic relationships had been damaged in the

⁴ The ancient Greek word for house/dwelling space is 'oikōs' and has the same roots as the word for familiar, 'oikēiōs' (Kaika, 2004: 272).

past, women used their time in homeless hostels to reflect on past mistakes and worked to recover old relations as well as constructing new ones. These reconstructed new relationships are the focus of subsequent discussion.

Recreating Home and Family in the Hostel

For many participants, especially those residing in hostels, home still revolved around family, but not family in the traditional biological sense of the word. Present relationships were often drawn primarily from other people who were homeless and usually residing in the same hostel. Women recreated home and family within the space of the hostel, or in 'Other spaces' (May, 2000), subverting the idea (and ideal) of home as the domestic, familial house and complicating the very notion of 'homelessness' itself. This section adds weight to the argument running throughout this thesis that the official label of 'homeless' does not reflect the reality of those experiencing it and Veness' (1993) point that definitions of 'homelessness' are inhabited by normative definitions of 'home'. But, just as one can feel home-less in the family home, one can also feel 'home-ful' in officially defined 'homeless' spaces, such as the hostel.

Home, for many, was defined as the people who care and take care of one another, with friends and staff often described as family. During the photo-elicitation interview, when Jo was asked which photograph was most representative of her identity, she chose the photograph (*Figure 11*) below and explained:



Figure 11: Photograph by Jo (blurred for anonymity)

I think...like, do you know the party? I mean Katie is really important to me, we're really close me and Katie. We help each other through a lot of things. And when things get too much for me I always go down into Katie's room and I disappear down there for a few days. They're all looking for me. But the party... apparently, they've never done that for anybody in here before. And they're like 'It's just 'cause you're so... you look after everybody'. I'm like everybody's mum. I tell everybody off, like 'You need to do this, you need to do that'. So I kind of look after everybody here so I think that one would be the most important to me, where everybody made an effort and come down and made me a party. They didn't have to do it. And they all took time out of their day. Katie went shopping for all stuff. And they made me a party (Jo).

The relationship between Jo and Katie was almost sisterly: Jo sought solace and support from Katie, her best friend in the hostel, when 'things [got] too much'. There was a reciprocal sense of solidarity in their relationship, which was reminiscent of that between siblings and other family members: '... we're really close me and Katie. We help each other through a lot of things'. Katie's room became a hiding place, a refuge, or a place of retreat possessing similar characteristics to 'home', where Jo could 'disappear' for 'a few days' and no-one could find her. It was also Katie who organised and bought in food for Jo's birthday party: 'Katie got it all sorted, bless her'. The importance of the close relationship between Jo and Katie was that it provided them with a sense of home through a feeling of belonging and shared experiences: 'But me and Katie are quite close. Similar age. Similar backgrounds and things like that'. Because the hostel provided

a shared dwelling space, in many ways it replicated the family home and fostered relationships that were somehow more than those between friends and more akin to those of siblings.

The photograph of the party was also important for Jo because, as Jo said, it was the first time a party had been organised for someone's birthday in the hostel. According to Jo, the reason for this unique event was because she 'look[s] after everybody', 'like everybody's mum'. In this way, Jo had become a substitute mum, acting out the familiar tropes associated with motherhood: care, discipline and giving out advice. That Jo had taken on a maternal, motherly role suggests that familial structures are replicated in spaces outside of the domestic house, and are important to those living in temporary supported accommodation, possibly to imitate normative ideals of home in an unfamiliar space, or possibly – since some had never had that ideal – to carve it out anew for themselves in a different space, since past homes connoted abuse and a lack of care. This finding corresponds with that of Kidd and Evans (2011), who found that homeless (rough sleeping) youth presented a transformed and broadened notion of home, which was comprised of friends, in opposition to 'homes' that were abusive and uncaring; a truer sense of comfort and belonging was found on the street. The company of the other residents still went some way to providing Jo with a sense of belonging, something that she had lacked in the past, before becoming 'homeless', when she was living in a house with her ex-partner and a drug dependency:

For the seven years we were together, he totally isolated me from my family and my friends... didn't see any of them. My sister and my mum used to turn up at my house and I used to turn them away because I couldn't have people just dropping in (Jo).

But assuming that Jo derived a complete sense of home from the hostel, and her friendship network there, would be overly simplistic. Later in the interview, and when directly asked 'where is home?' Jo drew distinctions between her sense of home and her 'real home', by replying that although the hostel felt like a home, she did not go so far as calling it 'home' (rather, her 'room'). Thus, while Jo tried her best to construct a familial, homely space out of the hostel, she did not hold any

romantic illusions about hostel life. Relationships provided Jo with a sense of home, but not to the extent that Jo could ever consider the hostel as a true home, which she still saw as a (future) fixed, physical dwelling: 'I think 'home' is a house. It sounds daft but I can't imagine home being a flat. Like, I want it to be a house'. While this interjection suggests that Jo still clung to a notion of home that she (and/or society) thought she should have, it also said something about relationships: that they simultaneously uphold and uproot notions of home.

Jo's descriptions of life in the hostel were mixed, all at once containing hints of a sense of home as well as un-home. The sense of belonging that Jo felt with Katie was often undermined by feelings of insecurity and unease: 'like here you can be constantly on edge, expecting summat to happen. So you never relax and my home is somewhere I imagine relaxing and chilling out'. Nevertheless, although Jo's sense of home was rooted in the more conventional notion of a house, relationships provided Jo with a sense of belonging for a while at least, confirming that some associations of home can be found in alternative accommodation. Jo's sense of home at the hostel, while found in close relationships, was fragile; constantly in jeopardy of being disrupted by the chaos of other residents' activities. So, while relationships can (re)create home in homeless accommodation they can just as easily shatter it.

Having had the chance to interview Jo's friend, Katie, it was evident that similar findings existed in her accounts too. Katie saw the hostel as home, the hostel staff as babysitters and her fellow residents as relations:

K: It's like the staff are your babysitters, it's mad. You get told off for stuff you've not done... sorry, oops [laughs]. It's a bit of guidance though, innit...

L: So is that what makes it home for you... the people?

K: Yeah, in a way. It's like everyone's related to you somehow. It is...'cause that's the bond that you get in here. And you do get that with the staff as well to be honest. I can't knock it at all (Katie).

That Katie described the staff as babysitters implied a paternalistic kind of relationship between staff and residents; the staff's role was almost authoritative and overprotective in that 'you get told off for stuff you've not done'. At the same

time, Katie recognised the other side to this, seeing it as 'a bit of guidance'. Katie saw the hostel as home because of the bond between residents and between residents and staff. As Katie said, 'everyone's related to you somehow'.

Katie had taken similar photographs of Jo's party and had chosen these as the most representative of her identity, and the ones that meant the most to her (see *Figures 12 and 13* below):

'Cause it's got all mates in and what are near...you know, people that actually mean summat and stuff like that. So, that is basically our group even though everybody's friends with everybody...you've got your set kind of groups (Katie).



Figure 12: Photograph by Katie (blurred for anonymity)



Figure 13: Photograph by Katie (blurred for anonymity)

Considering that both Jo and Katie chose photographs of the party as the most representative – mainly due to the important people and the relationships within the hostel that they depicted – said a lot about the significance of relationships to women's sense of belonging in 'homeless' spaces. In this sense, 'home' does not have to be restricted to the physical domestic structure of the 'house' but can be defined by and broadened to social networks, connections, and people who take care of one another.

Neither was this restricted to one hostel. Both Tori and Danni (who resided at the same hostel as each other) spoke of their accommodation as home and the staff and residents as family:

Pam, I love to bits. I could kiss her feet, I swear down. She's done a lot for me. Sue, she's brilliant but she's as stubborn as me, it's just... she's like my mum, she's like another mum (Tori).

This is my home. This is my home. I couldn't go anywhere without thinking of this place. This is all I've got for now. I wouldn't give it up. Not again. Got too many friends. It's family, it's how we are. So this is... yeah, this is my home (Danni).

Danni saw the hostel as home partly because it was 'all [she's] got for now' but also because her friends (who she saw as family) were there. Tori directly referred to

Sue, a support worker at the hostel, as 'another mum', suggesting that homeless women re-create their own families to consist of people who are more supportive. This may be particularly the case for Tori given that relations with her 'real' mother were tarnished and volatile: 'Keep my distance as much as I can'. This suggests that even for persons who have had minimal lived experience of the typical home-ful constructs, it is still possible to re-create a sense of home elsewhere in alternative spaces; that families do not have to be biological or the people one has grown up with, but can be composed of people who care about each other.

This section has shown how relationships are fundamental in shaping experiences of home, homelessness and identity; just as identity is relational so too is home. What these findings suggest for broader conceptualisations of identity is that the self is integrally connected to others. Giddens' (1991) 'project of the self' and Beck's (1992) 'individualisation' thesis, which assert the replacement of relational social bonds by individual self-fulfilment and personal development, do not fit what is happening here. As Duncan and Smith (2006) suggest, if individualisation is taking place, then it is occurring *within* the social bonds of the family. 'Family' still remained central to the lives, identities, and meanings of 'home' for the women in this study, even if families were not composed of traditional structures, but had more to do with the women's own making. However, as networks of friends or fellow hostel residents stood in for family for many of the women, there is support here for the argument that meanings of 'the family' are undergoing radical challenge (Duncan and Smith, 2006). At the same time, neither do findings suggest, as the individualisation thesis does, that the women were practising self-centred individualism or a lack of commitment. Indeed, women remained wholeheartedly committed to their friends (who they presently saw as 'family'), their biological families (even if relations had been damaged), and to their children (mainly from whom they had been separated), and these social ties remained highly significant in shaping 'home' and self. This idea relates to Duncan and Smith's (2006: 5) notion of the 'do-it-yourself' family, whereby commitment is still present yet the family has been individually and flexibly created. As relationships have proven to be crucial in the making of 'home', these findings concur with

Duncan and Smith's (2006: 19) statement that, 'people may be... just as connected to others as before, if now in different ways and within different forms'.

If identity is a relational entity (Gergen, 1991) it is no surprise that experiences and relationships within the home affect it. Since the idea of 'home' is inherent in relationships (or, one could say that home *is* relationships), then home can be felt where one belongs, and home-lessness experienced when one feels 'out of place', which can quite easily be in the family house. In this sense, many participants were 'homeless' but not home-less. The role of social networks and relationships in helping homeless women to (re)-establish a sense of home in 'homeless' accommodation was crucial. This finding concurs with Stephen's (2000) who found that relationships with fellow hostel residents were prominent in maintaining a sense of wellbeing. For many women, for whom no sense of home had ever really been enjoyed in former family houses, the formation of close familial relationships and social networks served as a strategy for re-making 'home', establishing 'alternative domesticities' (Datta, 2005) and 'reconstructing meaningful, dignified lives in light of ongoing dislocation and dispossession' (Kidd and Evans, 2011: 755). Women's re-making of home in the hostels, through relationships, can be viewed as an active strategy, a re-claiming of the idea of home, since, while women possess these meanings, they are not home-less.

The findings here relate to Dovey's (1985) conceptualisation of home as spatial and social order. Dovey (1985) argues that considering home, in this way, infuses it with a degree of flexibility, since it transcends a dependence on place. As such, 'home' can be adapted to changing social circumstances, like becoming officially 'homeless', and is independent of any building or structure (Frank, 2005). Actual, felt home-lessness was experienced by some women in this study not due to a lack of dwelling but, consistent with Zingmark (2000: 32), due to an absence from 'a mode of relationship'. While many participants found home in the hostel, due to their relationships and sense of belonging, other women (notably, Bella, Jules, and at times, Tori and Jo) felt home-less when disconnected from others and sensing a loss in their personhood. The effects of home-lessness on personhood will be explored in Chapter Six.

However, as 'home' and identity are so dependent on relationships, if those relationships are failing or absent, feelings of displacement and home-lessness result. As relationships are changing, fluid and unfixed, neither was a sense of home constant in the women's accounts. As was shown in Jo's narrative, relationships can make or break a sense of home in any one person, at any one time, and in any one place. The findings here confirm that since identity is relational and social (Lawler, 2008), and identity is tied to home – as the introduction to this chapter elaborated – for one to feel 'at home', meaningful interactions with others must occur. Others are needed to validate both a sense of self and a sense of home: 'one cannot be a self on one's own' (Taylor, 1989: 36). Officially defined 'homeless' women can find home and a sense of self (even if these feelings do fluctuate) if close and supportive relationships are fostered and maintained within homeless accommodation.

5.8. Conclusion

So far, a discussion of empirical data has complicated the notion of 'home' and its relationship with identity for officially-defined 'homeless' women. An exploration of the link between home and identity found that home is indeed a locus of identity, but not in ways that the literature (Casey, 2001; Thompson, 2007; Easthope, 2004; Jacobs and Smith, 2008) suggests. The findings in this study differ from those of other works cited above due to its difference in focus: the loss of home and its effects on identity for a marginalised group – women experiencing homelessness. Discussion interweaved empirical data on the meanings of home for women officially defined as 'homeless' with the theoretical concepts of the *unheimlich* (Freud, [1985] 1919), exile, and homesickness (Bauman, 1995), as well as theories of identity (Giddens; 1991; Beck, 1992; Lawler, 2008), concepts largely neglected by the body of literature on homelessness and identity, and therefore acts as a contribution to this gap.

In order to establish the effects of home-loss, the participants' constructions of home, or home-meanings, in the context of their home-lessness, were additionally explored. Responses were not straightforward, but encompassed: home being the

domestic house or the parental 'home'; the past home structuring the meaning of the home in the present; the hostel becoming the home; and alternative spaces being felt as home.

Some participants also expressed more than one home-sphere. The women in this study often lacked the normative values of home (patriarchal family relations, privacy, ownership), which left them feeling 'homeless' some of the time. Yet, some of the women still felt non-conventional places to be homely while citing conventional images of home as important to them. Thus, Jo felt at 'home' in the hostel when she felt needed by others, but at the same time, described 'home' as a house; and Jenny referred to the hostel in terms of home-like characteristics but did not name it as her 'true' home (which she saw as her family home). From this, it was deduced that the ghost of the 'real home' still haunted participants, despite their creation of a 'sense of home' elsewhere.

Returning to the original question – does a loss of home necessarily entail a loss of self? – it was found that for some it did to a certain extent. But by no means did the loss of 'home' equate to the loss of house. Because of the diversity of home-meanings for the women in this research, becoming 'homeless' in the official sense (or house-less), did not lead to a total loss of self or a subsequent disruption of identity. Participants subverted the normative definitions of 'home' by finding 'home' in unfixed dwellings and familiarity in unfamiliar environments, and vice versa. So, home-lessness did have a profound effect on the sense of self but rather than being linked to a loss of house, it related to a loss of home-feelings (family, love, and a sense of belonging).

As this chapter has shown, a sense of self can be preserved without a house. The home (especially the bourgeois home) has long since been seen as a 'stage for the development of the self' (Steiner, 2010: 137); a place bound up with identity, as Easthope (2004: 134) notes, a 'base around which identities are constructed'. It followed from this that if the home was lost, identity would be at threat, if indeed one lacked 'a site for constituting and performing selfhood' (Jacobs and Smith, 2008: 515). Yet, as this chapter has shown, neither home nor identities were

necessarily singular, fixed, or place-bound. As identities are not bounded, stable or consistent, the idea that individuals derive one identity from one home is redundant. Home did not emanate from any individualised notions of self, and neither did individualised notions of self stem from home. Therefore, while a relationship did exist between home and identity, both home and identity were relational, multiple and fluid. As Svašek (2002: 514) argues, 'identity must not be regarded as a fixed label, but rather as a complex and at times paradoxical process'. For many of the women, home was derived from relationships and social ties, meaning that 'homeless' women could find home(s) from close and supportive relationships within 'homeless' accommodation.

We may surmise so far, then, that home is a locus of identity, but home certainly does not have to be the domestic house or a particular place, it can be a multitude of feelings, relationships and spaces. In a world becoming ever more fragmented (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Bauman and Vecchi, 2004), so too are homes and identities multiplying and becoming more porous and *portable*: homes, as emotional and relational entities, can be carried with a person. My findings add to the deconstruction of identity-place, the idea that identification processes are rooted in territorial assumptions, and supports Giddens' (1991: 146-147) claim that: 'place does not form the parameter of experience'. Individuals can have multiple homes as well as hybrid identities. As Bauman and Vecchi (2004: 11) state: 'one becomes aware that "belonging" and "identity" are not cut in rock. That they are not secured by a lifelong guarantee, that they are eminently negotiable and revocable...' The complexity of the relationship between home and identity renders subjective experiences of homelessness to be equally intricate and nuanced (this point is explored later in Chapters Six and Seven).

Thus, in terms of identity, the link between self and home need not be so clear-cut, in that 'identity implies a certain bonding or mergence of person and place such that the place takes its identity from the dweller and the dweller takes his or her identity from the place' (Dovey, 1985: 6). Instead, as Rouse (1991) suggests, the ways in which we define our identities can no longer be articulated through the traditional terminology of place-based belonging; 'it no longer represents simply

one particular place, but rather a dispersed set of linkages across the different places through which [we] move' (Morley, 2000: 43). As Choi (2012: 1) posits, 'the notion of home is increasingly destabilised as the postmodern tropes of travel, flux, fluidity or mobility have dominated individuals' re-imagining of their sense of being'.

As participants' narratives of home diverged in meaning, mirroring the dimensionality of home as a construct, it also followed that homelessness was a heterogeneous experience and led to different responses in different individuals. For some (such as Frankie and Bella), it was an experience which seeped through various aspects of their lives and selves, causing a grieving effect for a lost home or an absence of belonging; what Bauman (1995: 97) calls 'homesickness', or the 'urge to feel at home, to recognise one's surroundings and belong there... the [dream] of being, for once, of the place, not merely in'. Whilst Frankie yearned for her past home, for others, home was a distant and unrealisable dream of belonging, such as Bella's quick dismissal of ever finding home and/or family. Frankie's yearning for home was characteristic of the concept of the exile: one who is translocated, voluntarily or by coercion (Friedrich, 2002). Frankie's bittersweet and nostalgic descriptions of her past family home and life which she was severed from, suggest that she was tied to a notion of home located in the past, which was distant and unapproachable: 'an impossible object, always disappearing with the horizon' (Biernat-Webster, 2010). Her memories of home were particularly strong and emotionally-charged – as well as selective – such as they are for the exile, people who are forced to leave their 'homeland', to which they will most likely not return (Biernat-Webster, 2010). For both the homesick and the exile, home is always elsewhere.

Ultimately, homelessness does not necessarily entail loss and absence of home; indeed it can lead to the creation of alternative 'homely' spaces, although they might not be named as such. And homeless people do not simply acquiesce to such loss and absence; they carve out other identities for themselves in other areas of life.

These findings lead to a questioning of the familiarity and homeliness of our most familiar environment: the family, domestic home. Findings have confirmed that alienation and homelessness can be felt within the familiar, and that the 'über-homeliness of the... interior conceals a deeply rooted sentiment of alienation' (Steiner, 2010: 142). For some participants, at-home-ness was not felt within the 'bliss' of one's home but in alternative spaces (hostels, parks, green spaces, with friends). Certainly, the findings discussed within this chapter benefit by being encompassed under the concept of the *unheimlich* or the uncanny – a concept neglected by the homelessness literature – and the idea of vacillation between homely and un-homely, home and homelessness. Findings point to an 'uncanny' process of inversion at work, whereby the supposedly familiar domestic sphere of the house, or the family 'home' – commonly associated with restfulness and security through the exclusion of fear, anxiety and upheaval – turned into an alien space, while the unfixed institutional-like hostel became the homely. As discussion showed, this process does not just take place between two dwellings but similarly occurs within one place. For some, the hostel fluctuated between being felt both as a homely and an un-homely space, suggesting that the dualism between home and un-home is not so clear-cut. Home featured in the women's lives as an uncanny mix between refuge and unsafe space. As Kaika (2004: 281) affirms, querying the familiarity of the home can be an act of subversion in itself, turning on its head the binary between home and homelessness and insisting that each is implicated in the other.

What these findings hint at, so far, is that just as there is more than one home, there is also more than one homelessness. While there is an official, legally-defined 'homelessness' (which might entail having a home but not a house), this chapter has shown that there is also home-lessness (having a house but not a home), when all the elements that make up home for an individual are lacking. There seems to be an implicit connection between these two meanings: when women were 'homeless' (officially so), they often re-created a sense of home in alternative accommodation but still lacked what they saw as a 'real home' (a house). Yet, when the women were in a 'real home', or a house, they felt home-less. In answering the question, *does homelessness affect the self?* it could be argued that it does not, since

women re-constructed home, which was often what they lacked to begin with. At the same time, it could equally be argued that it does indeed affect it, since the spectre of the 'real home' haunted the women; it was what they missed, what they aspired to, what society said they needed, but what they could never reach. Women felt the stigma of not having a 'real home', of being 'homeless', even if they had established an alternative sense of home somewhere else. Nevertheless, the women actively re-negotiated home and self, in spite of (or because of) this loss or lack; and worked to negotiate the effects of home-lessness as a lack of home, through re-creating home and relationships elsewhere. The next chapter shows that 'homelessness', as an official label, similarly marked the self and was strategically managed by the women in this study.

6. Stigma: On Becoming Homeless/Not Homeless

6.1. Introduction

Although the participants in this study belonged to a stigmatised social group – all being homeless or vulnerably housed; some having drug or alcohol dependencies – it was not the case that all felt stigmatised in the same way or had the same way of managing it. If homelessness does not feature as central to a person's self-concept or self-definition, they may be less likely to feel the stigma associated with it; although a social identity may be spoiled, it does not have to follow that a personal identity is equally tarnished. As argued in Chapter Five, home and identity are linked, albeit in ways more complex than some of the literature suggests. Although women recreated home in alternative accommodation, the spectre of the 'real home' (as defined by normative societal values) as well as the label of 'homelessness' haunted and affected them, meaning that a degree of identity-work and stigma-management was necessary.

The way stigma was felt (or not) and responded to (or not) related back to how the women defined and felt home and home-lessness. For instance, Jo felt a sense of home in the relationships she had established in the hostel (Section 5.7). But because she still saw 'home' as a house, she felt home-lessness as a lack, and worked to negotiate the effects of home-lessness; in this case, distancing from 'other' homeless people by drawing on dominant stereotypes and mitigating her stigmatised status. Likewise, Jules felt the effects of home-lessness because she lacked a house (although she found a sense of home in creative pursuits) and felt like an incomplete person as a result. Jules engaged in identity-maintenance to preserve her personal identity in the face of a stigmatised social identity, by 'normalising' homelessness (Kusenbach, 2009) and 'talking back to' it (Juhila, 2004).

This chapter focuses on the effects of becoming 'homeless' on self-identity to show how the women felt stigmatised. The first section (6.2) sets the context for following discussion of how a sense of stigma was responded to and managed by the women.

6.2. Effects of Becoming 'Homeless' on Self-Identity

This section focuses on how the loss of home, or becoming 'homeless', affected the women in this study, in terms of identity, before subsequent discussion delves into the women's various responses to changes in housing and status. As explored in the previous chapter, participants' current identities were shaped considerably by traumatic past home lives. Home-lessness began earlier than entering homelessness services; for some, it was a constant feature of early life trajectories. This section focuses on the effects and affects of becoming 'homeless', or being home-less, in the sense of being without a home or being officially labelled as such through engaging with homelessness services which assumes a confrontation with a 'homeless' positionality. This section focuses on effects of homelessness and the following section looks at women's responses to it.

Awareness of Labelling and Judgement

On becoming 'homeless', many of the women were aware of labelling and judgement from others: they were aware that 'the homeless' occupied a stigmatised category. Gretel explained others' perceptions as such:

L: And how do you think other people sort of see like think about the word homeless, like people who have never sort of experienced it?

G: I know what they think... they think that you're lazy and you can't be arsed to get yourself out... find yourself somewhere to live... or get yourself a job... you just can't be arsed... you're just a bum... or a scrubber or whatever. They just don't know. Like you can't work full-time while you live 'ere 'cause it's £150 a week rent and people think this is like a scruffy place... (Gretel).

Gretel's response conveyed awareness that many 'housed' people (referred to here as 'they') viewed hostel residents as part of an 'underclass'. Because they lacked a permanent place of residence, Gretel noted, others saw residents as 'lazy', as 'bums' and 'scrubbers' who 'can't be arsed', as well as seeing the hostel itself as 'a scruffy place'. Of note here is how Gretel used the word 'they' to refer to those she saw as carrying out the judging. Her use of 'they' grouped those who judge and those who have not experienced homelessness into the same oppositional category. Gretel's categories spoke to her own sense of identity and sense of

inclusion in the hostel resident group (she used a collective 'you') and her exclusion from the non-homeless group ('they'). Similarly, Jenny perceived that others labelled the hostel as 'rough', 'bad' and 'rubbish'. She explained how even people in positions of authority, such as her college tutors, were too quick to judge:

Erm, a lot of people don't understand. Err, like the way they label it, they just think 'oh, druggies, or...' Like as soon as I moved in, teachers at college were like 'Oh, I hear you're living at Greencourt Hostel. Have you had an argument with your mum?' and stuff. And it's like everyone just gets judged, like you're a spoilt brat or you've been abused or you've got all these arguments but... some people have in here but there's other people who just wanna move out 'cause they want their own space (Jenny).

Yet, Jenny explained further how judging was not confined to non-homeless groups; it also occurred between residents from different hostels, and between residents within the same hostel:

I mean I've got a friend now who lives in HLA [another hostel], and I mean she's seen some states. She sees people with needles and... overdosing in front of her. And fighting and... and trying to cut themselves in front of her. I was like 'Oh my god', and I says 'Apply here'. And she goes 'Oh no, I wouldn't want to apply there' (1)

But everyone just... I think people in 'ere judge. Not the staff... but the young people, because they go 'that person's on drugs' or whatever (2)

Despite Jenny's friend having witnessed 'some states', including injecting, overdosing, fighting, and self-harm, she still, as Jenny said, refused to apply to Jenny's hostel, dismissively retorting: 'Oh no, I wouldn't want to apply there'. Likewise, residents within the same hostel judged each other, for example, 'that person's on drugs or whatever'. Partly, as it is argued in Section 6.4, this distancing strategy can be conceptualised as a response to stigma.

For the sake of discussion here, these accounts illustrate how interaction was at the centre of how women experiencing homelessness come to realise their membership in a stigmatised group (Goffman, 1963). Both Gretel's and Jenny's responses exemplified the notion that identity was established through and across

difference (Hall and Du Gay, 1996), as well as an understanding of self in relation to other groups (Goffman, 1963).

Emotional and Affective Responses

As well as being acutely aware of the labelling and judgement of 'others' towards their definitional social group, 'homeless' women were deeply affected by their positioning as 'homeless', as well as their lack of a home when considered in relation to homed others. This was evidenced by a range of emotional responses, coming mainly from Frankie and Jules, who, in turn, this section focuses on. This finding concurs with Tajfel's (1978) argument that knowledge of ourselves as members of a social group is imbued with an emotional significance.

First, discussion focuses on Jules and the suffering she experienced as a result of not having a home. Jules' grief stemmed from the comparisons she drew between herself as home-less and others as home-ful; as well as seeing herself as not fitting into the norms of contemporary Western society and its conflation of 'home' with house. Jules' anguish is evident in her statement, 'if people weren't meant to have homes then I would say I am a complete person'. Lacking a 'home' (as a house) made Jules feel like an incomplete person because it failed to meet societal standards even though 'home' for Jules was primarily a state of mind, 'a subversive orientation that directly challenged the home ideal' (Kidd and Evans, 2011: 768):

I think home for me is when I feel happy in myself, that's home, when I haven't got any problems or, like, I'm not stressed, that's... sounds a bit cliché but that's home (Jules).

Similar to travellers and nomadic cultures, the version of Jules' 'home' was not associated with a physical structure. As explored in Chapter Five, this strategy allowed for a subversion of the normative definition of home – and by implication, homelessness – and, ultimately, its re-creation. So, conversely, when Jules was unable to express herself, or do anything creative, she would not have a 'good state of mind', and would feel 'uncomfortable and not at home':

Yeah, when I've got a good state of mind, that's home. Yeah. Because, like, say like I wasn't able to be creative or, like, do something that I liked, then I wouldn't feel at home. So like, when I know I can do that, then I'm at home (Jules).

Nevertheless, as demonstrated in Chapter Five, participants had more than one home-sphere, Jules similarly had more than one meaning of home. Home, for Jules, also meant good relationships, and a place of her own, which she could furnish and decorate as she wished, none of which she possessed at the time of interviewing:

But to me, my home is somewhere where I've got my stuff in, it's... it's... I don't know... it's decorated as how I want it (Jules).

These dual meanings of home – as state of mind on the one hand and her own physical house/container for her possessions on the other – often worked in tension, so that even if Jules could feel home-ful when she felt in a good state of mind, her simultaneous meaning of home as physical place meant that she really did feel home-less when she was house-less and officially 'homeless'. When asked what the label 'homeless' meant to her, Jules replied that because she did not have her 'own place', it made her feel that she was not a complete person 'because I haven't got something that most people have'. In this response, Jules' idealised place-based meaning of home came into play and worked to reinforce Jules' comparable lack of 'home' and 'self', in relation to 'most people'. Jules elaborated on these feelings, later in the interview:

I would say that I'm not... well... I would say that I'm not a complete - if that's the right word - complete person because I haven't got a home. I mean, obviously, if people weren't meant to have homes then I would say I am a complete person but I mean I'm not a materialistic person, like, I'm not into, like, loads of money and stuff. I'd like more money but I'm not, like, obsessed by money so... but I think in general, because I've not got anywhere to live, I don't feel a complete person (Jules).

Becoming 'homeless', or lacking home, for Jules, while she saw home as a place, 'functioned as an internal *measure* of [her] lack or incompleteness' (Kidd and Evans, 2011: 767). It was not just that Jules *described* herself as 'homeless' or home-less, it was that her difference from the norm, in terms of her distance from

social values around what constitutes a 'home', made her *feel like a different person*. Jules' suffering over the lack of home stemmed from the distance between her own circumstances and living situation, her understandings of what a home meant, and the *social value* attached to having one: 'if people weren't meant to have homes then I would say I am a complete person'.

Jules defined herself and her sense of home as against the oppositional, and came out as lacking: she felt incomplete because she did not measure up in terms of what others value. Western society's obsession with homes, especially home-ownership, indirectly affects those who cannot attain this ideal. Just as Wetherell and Mohanty (2010) argue that the 'other' is central to conceptions of selfhood, so are normative constructions of home integral to feelings of home-lessness, and so does the situation of the homed seep into and influence Jules' feelings of lack as homeless despite her ultimate view of home as a state of mind.

Frankie's feelings about becoming homeless were directed more towards the act of being defined, named – or what she described as being 'branded' – as 'homeless'. Frankie spoke of the label 'homeless' like it was an insult or denunciation:

I think they should lose the 'homeless', and you know, because it's not nice to be called 'homeless'. It's erm, I feel that people are branded 'homeless'. It's not very nice (Frankie).

The first effect of becoming homeless for Frankie, then, was having an ill-fitting - what she saw as derogatory - label applied to her by 'professional people' and 'television', and having no choice in the matter – it is 'branded' on her. Frankie felt strongly about this mis-labelling:

...it's quite sad, it makes me feel sad, erm... it makes me feel scared sometimes... and it makes me feel, it makes me feel not part of society, you know (Frankie).

Being called 'homeless' forced Frankie to confront the reality of her housing situation. It compelled her to view her life in terms of a discourse of failure and helplessness. The moment she accepted the term 'homeless', she would become a

homeless person, and all the stereotypes associated with that label. This finding correlates with Farrugia's (2011: 763); that people experience homelessness in individualistic terms, commonly experiencing shame and devaluing themselves as part of this experience. The label of 'homelessness' troubled Frankie because she saw it as representing a personal biographical failure:

But I want to turn my life around. I want to do something; I want to, I don't want to be like this forever, I want to; I don't want to lose my self-respect. Lose my dignity. You know, I'd like to save what I've got: my pride, erm, my sense of humour, I want to keep that (Frankie).

It is almost as if accepting the label would equate to accepting defeat for Frankie: she cannot be 'homeless' because she wants to turn her life around. Being 'homeless' would mean a loss of pride, dignity and a sense of humour.

It is Frankie's contact with professionals that had positioned her in relation to homelessness, a discourse that she saw as disempowering, that made her feel ashamed and had consequences for her identity. Although she had lost her home, Frankie struggled against falling into a subject position defined by her homelessness and therefore by failed self-management (Farrugia, 2011). The transition from homed to homeless was tied up with the self: while Frankie accepted that becoming homeless meant a loss of home ('...people use it when you're homeless, which I'm not, but I am at the moment, because I can't go back there 'cause of what I've done'), she resisted the label because of what it would do to her identity. It is not only grief over the loss of home that Frankie suffered but also grief over being labelled as such, as being known as 'homeless'. For Frankie, then, homelessness did not just affect her in and of itself; it was other people knowing about it; the stigma of being known as 'homeless'. This finding was also played out by Frankie in her reaction to being approached by the drop-in centre staff when they asked, on my behalf, if she wanted to take part in this research:

That's one thing they asked me at the centre, erm, if I was interested in, you know, erm, I found it quite, it's the way they actually said it, you know... I felt as though they were... they'd said it all wrong... they didn't say it very tactfully. And I felt as though, they made me feel as though they were invading my privacy. And I thought I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. And I said 'Yeah, I don't mind'. Erm, but I feel more relaxed with you. But they just... I don't know... I know I've got very strong feelings and I always have a gut feeling, I'm very sensitive and I get, I get hurt (Frankie).

Frankie was sensitive about her 'homeless' status, and preferred to keep that part of herself as guarded as possible. When Frankie was directly asked if she wanted to take part in a project about 'women and homelessness', she was confronted with an identity marker she did not see herself as fitting, and most of all, did not like to think others knew about: 'they made me feel as though they were invading my privacy'. Then again, Frankie implied that it made a difference *who* the person was that did the asking ('I feel more relaxed with you') and *how* they said it ('it's the way they actually said it, you know... they'd said it all wrong... they didn't say it very tactfully'). Still, this account suggests that Frankie saw her homelessness as something not to be spoken of, or known about by others: it was then that it became real and had the capacity to hurt her. Although Frankie was homeless in an official sense, she lived a life that was relatively comparable to being homed: she resided in a single occupancy flat on the lower floor of a terraced house that she felt fairly happy with and had personalised in her own way, and although Frankie received daily visits from key workers, she largely saw and spoke about them as friends. Because it was quite easy for Frankie to hide her 'homelessness', in her daily life, when it re-surfaced, it did so abruptly and impolitely.

Feelings of shame were evident in other participants' narratives, with reflections on past life events and self-blame being a common feature of explanations as to how they became homeless. Becoming homeless often entailed a focus inwards on the self, a process of introspection, which produced individualised reasons for the situations the women were in, rather than structural/societal ones. For instance, Gretel regretted running away from home, stating:

My dad lives on a right posh estate, I don't know how but... and my mum's got a nice house as well. So... I shouldn't have just run away (Gretel).

Similarly, Tori expressed grief about leaving her ex-partner, the flat they shared together, and her previous life; and Jo described the final catalytic incident that resembled 'rock bottom', and pushed her to seek support in the hostel:

'Cause he was a drug dealer, I just laid there one morning, thinking I don't want this, just packed while he was asleep, left... worst mistake, I regret that though to this day... Because now he's a respectable man and he could've... at time, he wasn't but now he is and it's like... I could've been like that (Tori)

But... the environment that I was in at work, erm, the lads on the shop floor all did drugs. So I used to get involved with them, and do all the drugs. And we went out before August bank holiday and they spiked my drink with, erm, MDMA. And I woke up in a house and I didn't have a clue where I was... with four blokes trying to get my trousers down. And luckily, nothing happened, and I've been told nothing happened, but I thought... the next day I was like coming round... I was on my own in a house with four blokes who did that, who I worked with, they were supposed to be my mates, I've worked with them for like seven years. And I didn't have a clue what was happening. Anything could've happened to me. And that was the lowest point... that was where I thought 'there's summat wrong, I need to stop what I'm doing'. But it took me a while to build up the courage to tell my family. And it wasn't until actually yesterday that I told my sister about that night, of what made me... and she was, like, really shocked. I said 'Yeah, it was...' It was the thought that I'd done that. And I can't say that I didn't encourage them or anything. Because I didn't know, 'cause they spiked my drink. So I didn't have a clue...and I used to drink quite a lot, like I couldn't cope with social situations, people being around me and stuff like that, so I used to drink. And then I'd be alright and I could talk to people and I'd be confident and things like that. That's how it works. Erm, so I didn't have a clue if I'd done anything to encourage them. So, it was, like, actually admitting, yeah, that happened and 'owt could've happened to me, and I wouldn't have had a clue (Jo)

In the above extract Jo described rape by supposed work 'mates', but her account was loaded with terms which implied feelings of shame and self-blame on her part (because she drank too much; lost control of herself); so much so that it took Jo years to work up the courage to tell her family about the incident. Gretel's, Jo's and Tori's narratives all described a movement into homelessness in individualistic terms, which described poor decision-making ('I regret that though to this day'; 'I shouldn't have just run away') loss of self-control ('owt could've happened to me, and I wouldn't have had a clue'), and self-blame ('It was the thought that I'd done that').

Jo and Frankie's accounts show that homelessness prompted a reflection on the self in individualised terms adding weight to the argument that thinking about one's identity may be prompted by 'things to fret about', or 'an essential problem [that] arises that calls one's habitual character into question' (Boydell *et al*, 2000: 28), such as homelessness. Similarly, the individualistic explanations adopted by the homeless women here are in line with more recent trends which suggest a shift among public attitudes in Britain, from a favouring of societal explanations about the causes of poverty to individualistic ones (NatCen Social Research, 2013). Giddens (1991) argues that shame is an element of reflexive identity in late modernity, which depends on feelings of personal insufficiency and anxiety about the kinds of biography a person has constructed. Still, although participants lost a part of their sense of self as worthy, they were nevertheless engaged in a process of active self-reflection. Capacity for self-reflection can have a healing effect in the face of threat and loss. So, although reflection in the aforementioned examples mainly centred on shame, grief and self-blame, it was also used as part of a crucial learning process, a way of re-creating and re-forming the self, as Chapter Seven will show.

Preceding accounts conveyed both an awareness of the stigma associated with homelessness, on the part of the women, as well as two emotional effects of becoming homeless – one relating to homelessness as a lack of home (homelessness) and one relating to homelessness as a label ('homelessness'). In both cases, homelessness was an embodied, felt and lived experience, with participants' grief being a key structuring principle of their homelessness and 'homelessness'. As this section has shown, the effects of homelessness are profound for some, though, as ensuing discussion in this chapter and Chapter Seven illustrates, it does not lead to a total loss of self, as women engaged in a range of strategies and negotiations to manage the homelessness label. Despite the recognition that homelessness had real effects on the self, many of the women in this study sought to defy the 'homelessness' stigma.

6.3. Normalising Homelessness and 'Talking Back' to Stigma

The remainder of this chapter unpicks responses to becoming homeless: the stigma associated with the label and how the women in this study negotiated the effect/affects of it.

Jules

This section focuses on Jules, whose response to the assumed stigmatising label of homelessness was quite dissenting in the study; instead of distancing herself from the marker, she 'normalised' it (Kusenbach, 2009: 421), or in Juhila's (2004) words, 'talked back' to it. Before elaborating on these strategies of identity-maintenance, it is necessary to provide a brief context: to introduce a background to Jules' life and housing history.

Now aged 26 years old, Jules has lived in Dorley for most of her life, having been brought up in care until the age of sixteen. Jules reported having a 'stable' upbringing and a 'good' foster mother:

...because I've not moved, I've only had one set of foster parents I had quite a... I wouldn't say a good time but...it wasn't bad, it was stable. So it was alright (Jules).

At the time of our contact, Jules was unable to receive support from her local authority ('now the council won't re-house me'), so was temporarily staying on the couch at her grandmother's house until she was in the position to be able to rent a place of her own. Interviewing took place at a local women's centre, specifically aimed at empowering women offenders and women at risk of offending, where Jules was then receiving support. Jules had lived in hostels, and spent three months in prison (for 'an incident [that] happened with my family a while ago' [this was clearly a difficult subject for Jules to talk about and the specifics were not delved into due to ethical commitments⁵]). Jules had a wide array of interests and hobbies,

⁵ During my initial meeting with the stakeholder at this organisation, I was warned that Jules had been diagnosed with anger issues. Although no evidence of this was displayed at any of our

including drawing, walking, filmmaking, photography, creative writing, Psychology, animal rights and she was currently learning to play the guitar; she pursued some of these hobbies at 'Creative Spark', adult learning workshops held at the local church, specifically aimed at developing links between the homeless community and other residents. Attending these workshops was incredibly important for Jules: her friendship network was there; and they also allowed Jules the opportunity to exercise her creativity ('for me to function properly I need to do something creative for the day'). Jules' ambition for the future was to be a Drama Therapist:

...because, like, I've been through quite a lot in my past and I like drama and music and it's a way of expressing myself. So I could understand how that could help other people so I would like to do that as a job to help other people (Jules).

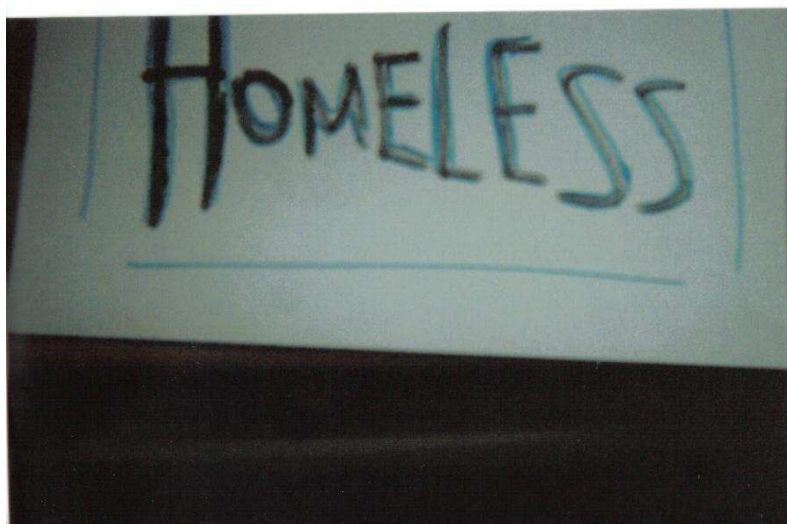


Figure 14: Photograph by Jules

Unlike many other participants, Jules quite boldly defined herself as homeless. Explaining why she took the above photograph (*Figure 14*) of a drawing she completed for one of her Creative Spark workshops, Jules said: 'And obviously, "homeless", because I am... even though I live, well, I'm staying with a relative, I am actually homeless. I haven't got my own home'. When asked if it was important for Jules to identify as homeless, she retorted:

interviews, I remained especially sensitive and endeavoured not to cause any harm by allowing Jules to tell me as much or as little as she wished, and probed less than with other participants.

I think it is a positive thing because obviously, you're trying to find somewhere to live. It's not... I don't know, I think it's a word that a lot of people are a bit scared of... (Jules)

In relating that 'a lot of people are a bit scared of' the word, 'homeless', Jules implied that she, indeed, was not. She took a rational stance that it was not only necessary to identify as homeless if 'you're trying to find somewhere to live', but positive too. Jules' acceptance of the label, 'homelessness', comes close to Snow and Anderson's process of 'embracement':

...the verbal and expressive confirmation of one's acceptance of and attachment to the social identity associated with a general or specific role, a set of social relationships, or a particular ideology (1987: 1354).

Jules did not necessarily identify with the social identity associated with homelessness (however mythic); she appropriated the name, the label, and the definition for the purposes of finding somewhere to live. While this indicates some degree of embracement of the term 'homelessness' by Jules, she did not accept the associations of the social identity it implied; as detailed later in this section, she avidly challenged them. Despite the dominant denigrations of the word, 'homeless', Jules did not object to applying it to herself; further still she welcomed it. This seemed like a defiant act in the circumstances, resonating more with the concept of 'reappropriation' (of stigmatising labels) more so than embracement. Reappropriation is a 'process whereby a stigmatised group revalues an externally imposed negative label by self-consciously referring to itself in terms of that label' (Galinsky *et al*, 2003: 222). Members of many stigmatised groups have used reappropriation historically in order to deconstruct disparaging views and terms by embracing them in a fight for equality (for example, the reappropriation of the word 'Queer' as a positive marker of identity by the gay community). As Galinsky *et al* (2003) posit, reappropriation may limit the negative implications of a label, lessening its power to affect self-esteem. Jules, in fact, compared the labelling of homeless people with that of gay people:

It's like when someone labels a gay person, like, they're just labelled as a gay person, they're not... like I'm a gay person, I don't have opinions to everybody else, I am just seen as the 'gay person'. So people need to, like, realise that people are different and people have different views on things (Jules).

While Jules proudly identified as both a homeless and a gay person, she asserted that she was other things too, and neither identity should be taken as all encompassing. Again, if homelessness does not feature as a major part of a person's self-concept, the social stigma attached to it is lessened. Here Jules shows that homelessness can still feature as one *part* of a person's identity but one need not succumb to the stigma; Jules had the agency to 'talk back to' and reappropriate the stigmatising label of 'homeless' even though at times, it made her feel like an incomplete person. There is more to Jules than her homelessness, just as there is more to her than her sexual orientation; however, others do not always see it like that: 'when someone labels a gay person, like, they're just labelled as a gay person'. Although reappropriation is almost always done collectively, it must begin with individuals: the beginnings of this can be seen with Jules, albeit in a minimal way. For the word, 'homeless', to take on more positive connotations, it would require repeated reappropriations and 'ultimately a concerted effort by a collective' (Galinsky *et al*, 2003).

As shown in Section 6.2, Jules' lack of home and house directly impacted on her self and made her feel *incomplete*. Despite this sense of suffering, Jules did not exhibit a sense of low self-esteem – a trait that some literature is adamant homeless women possess (Nyamathi *et al*, 2000) – and neither did she blame herself for her situation. She acknowledged the stigma that others applied to her as a homeless woman, while simultaneously adopting a capacity to cope, to manage her sense of self, and to feel in control. Such strategies of managing stigma are referred to here as 'normalising' (a term borrowed from Kusenbach, 2009) and 'talking back' (Juhila, 2004).

Jules demonstrated other instances of 'normalising' strategies, by deconstructing the perceived distance between 'homeless people' and others (the housed public). In the following extract, Jules explained how homelessness could happen to

'anybody', thus attempting to dispel the stereotypes and stigma surrounding the term:

I met a lot of people in hostels that are homeless and people with different backgrounds, even people that have got money are homeless so it's not, you know, I think people need to like understand that it can happen to anybody (Jules).

In the excerpt, Jules emphasised the diversity of the homeless people she had met in hostels: that people had come from different backgrounds, and 'even people that have got money are homeless'. As Jules stated, homelessness can 'happen to anybody'; and this is something that 'people need to understand'. In doing so, Jules implied that there are no essential differences between herself as homeless and others as housed. Jules normalised homelessness and living in a hostel if indeed it can happen to anyone. This technique bears a striking resemblance with Kusenbach's (2009: 421) definition of the term 'normalising' as 'the attempts... to point out essential similarities between themselves and other, presumably more respected, members of society'. Jules also spoke on behalf of the homeless population when she expressed her points of view, 'talking back' to the judgemental housed population in turn:

...like homeless people... it's just classed as a label like homeless people, they don't like... obviously homeless people aren't just a homeless person, they have, like, they have interests and they have opinions and... they are a person (Jules) (1).

I think people need to stop judging people. Erm, and just appreciate that people are different. And like homeless people... they need to appreciate... people are homeless because things have happened to them and they need to show people a bit of respect (Jules) (2).

In the first quote, Jules spoke of the importance of recognising each homeless person as an individual with interests, opinions and identities, rather than as a homogenous, amorphous body: 'the homeless'. Likewise, in the second quote, Jules might well be talking directly to the people who do the stigmatising. She asserted that people experience homelessness because 'things have happened to them', not through faults of their own making, so should be shown 'a bit of respect'. Throughout both quotes, there is a sense that Jules believed difference is

something to be celebrated, attributing it with a positive meaning rather than a stigmatising one. This particular technique of 'talking back' can be found in Juhila's (2004: 272) study with shelter residents, which she labels as 'identity politics': 'a person's identity is not only one and of one kind, either ordinary or out of the ordinary, but it is many and of many kinds'. The range and ordinariness of homeless people mirrors that of society itself. These tactics – normalising and 'talking back' to stigmatised identities – stand as an example of Goffman's (1955) face saving and serve as a method of counteracting the stigmatising discourses attached to the social identity of homelessness, preserving personal identity. Although Jules was aware that homelessness was a 'spoiled' social identity, she saw no reason why it should be. Deconstructing the stigma around the term, Jules accepted the label of homelessness and still kept her personal identity intact.

Nevertheless, while Jules recognised that homelessness could happen to anyone, and normalised it in this way, Section 6.2 highlighted that she was still affected by it: as she felt like an incomplete person without a house. This seeming contradiction illustrates the enduring effects of the homelessness stigma; that no matter how much Jules 'talked back to' it, normalised and rationalised it, the emotional effects were difficult to shake off.

The proceeding section looks at quite the opposite strategy of identity-management among the participants: that of 'distancing' and boundary work. In this case, participants outright rejected the label of homelessness; homelessness was something that belonged to 'others'.

6.4. Distancing

This section focuses on the identity maintenance technique known as 'distancing' as a way of shrugging off the stigma of homelessness. The majority of participants in this study distanced themselves from the label of homelessness, as well as from other homeless people – either ones known to them who resided in the same hostel or imagined 'others', usually seen as much worse off than them.

Before exploring empirical data further, distancing is introduced in more depth, along with similar – yet differently named – techniques, which provide a theoretical foundation for the findings. Distancing fits in with the interest in the concept of 'boundaries' in the social science disciplines, associated with research on social and collective identity (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). A number of studies have been concerned with analysing how certain groups contrast themselves to others (Newman, 1999; Kefalas, 2002). As Lamont and Molnar state:

Over the last twenty years, British and American social psychologists working on group categorization and identification have been studying the segmentation between “us” and “them” (2002: 169).

Harter *et al* (2005: 312) found that participants in their study distanced themselves from the label of homelessness because, as one participant stated ‘you have no idea how long it takes to get that label off your back’. As they conclude, ‘labelling is a powerful rhetorical lever that can be considered at once a genesis to and outcome of stigmatisation’ (2005: 312).

Other practices were found in Kusenbach’s (2009) research, which she termed ‘bordering’ and ‘fencing’. ‘Bordering’ referred to the erection of boundaries between one’s own community and distant ‘others’, while ‘fencing’ referred to accounts that emphasised differences *within* someone’s community. These two broad distancing techniques were also found in a substantial number of participants in Snow and Anderson’s (1987) study, namely dissociation from the general category of homelessness and dissociation from specific groups of homeless individuals. Snow and Anderson (1987) also found evidence of ‘role distancing’ and ‘institutional distancing’, the former constituting a lack of attachment to the role associated with homelessness, the latter involving individuals putting down institutions that serve the homeless. There can also be stigma attached to an institution, which the individual attempts to distance themselves from, as Goffman (1961) found in asylums, and in this case, hostels. The term ‘distancing’ originates in the study by Snow and Anderson (1987), but has since been applied to other groups from homeless women (Padavic, 1991) to

Irish immigrants (Field, 1994). Although different studies tend to apply different names to it, distancing is widely understood as:

...accepting the legitimacy of a devalued identity imposed by the dominant group, but then saying, in effect, "There are indeed Others to whom this applies, but it does not apply to me" (Schwalbe *et al*, 2000:425).

Reutter *et al* use the term 'cognitive distancing', arguing that:

...the strategy... suggests that participants do not necessarily refute the social identity *per se*, but distance themselves from it by arguing that it does not reflect their own personal identity (2009: 306).

According to Kusenbach (2009), distancing strategies help to salvage a sense of one's decency and foster a sense of belonging to mainstream society regardless of its disparaging views. Ensuing discussion illustrates these concepts in terms of the women's accounts in empirical work.

Distancing from the Label of 'Homelessness'

Rejection and disavowal of the label of 'homelessness' was common amongst participants. Some simply did not see it as applying to them. The fear of being stigmatised through association with the word 'homeless' was also transferred to one of the hostels. As Gretel summed up, 'the only thing wrong [with living in this hostel] is that it's a homeless shelter. And people just like... call you homeless'. Danni repeated this sense of stigma, feeling that others judged her upon entering the hostel:

And it's classed as a homeless shelter thing... And every time you walk into... when you type the code in... people are like 'Oh, they're homeless' you know, 'they're this and that' and stuff. So people do judge us. But then it's like well, hang on a minute, have you ever been in our situation? Have you ever been homeless? Well, if you haven't been homeless, you don't know what it's like... And just people judge us every time we walk by or say 'Oh, they live in Centre' you know (Danni).

In this extract, the process of entering the building – with its sign above the door announcing the name of the organisation (a well-known homeless charity) – and of

typing the code into the door, became a source of stigma, a symbolic stigma marking, which Danni believed led to judgement and labelling from non-homeless others. In this respect, distancing occurred not just from the label of homelessness but from any signifier of homelessness (Saussure, [1916] 1974), in this case, predominantly from the hostel, which brashly announced itself as an institution. Gretel felt similarly about the hostel preferring to describe it as a 'prison', 'rehab' or 'college' rather than a 'homelessness hostel':

I don't feel like I'm homeless. I know I'm labelled as being 'homeless' but I'm not. 'Cause it's more like, it's like, a bit like a prison... before you go to prison... it's like... but I don't know... it's like... rehab or summat, I don't know, or like a college or summat like that. 'Cause they just straighten you out and then send you off (Gretel).

This re-naming of the institution reoccurred with Jenny, who referred to it as 'supported housing before I become homeless... So I wouldn't say I'm completely homeless, I'd say I'm safe with the help of this supported housing'.

Danni continued to reject the label of homelessness further into our conversation, despite recognising that she was officially classed as so:

We're not exactly... we're not exactly classed as homeless. Yeah we are... well we are classed as homeless but we've got a roof over us heads.... so I wouldn't class us as homeless, but you know, it's one of them situations, you know, 'cause you're living here, you're homeless but... then again, you don't see it as you're homeless (Danni).

Danni saw the label of 'homeless' as ill-fitting for her, drawing attention to the paradox of being officially labelled as homeless but not feeling that way: 'you're living here, you're homeless but... then again, you don't see it as you're homeless'. She makes the all-important distinction between the official label, 'homeless' ('we are classed as homeless') and the identity ('you don't see it as you're homeless'). This demarcation suggests that homelessness was seen as a functional descriptor that could be used to describe one's circumstances and obtain support (and housing) rather than define the self. This explains Danni's seemingly contradictory

statements that she is simultaneously classed as 'homeless' but did not feel or see it as such.

This section has shown how some participants distanced themselves from the label of homelessness and associated signifiers, by rejecting it outright or re-naming it. This finding concurs with previous work on distancing (Goffman, 1961; Goffman 1963; Kusenbach, 2009; Reutter *et al*, 2009; Rayburn and Guittar, 2013) as a strategy of dealing with the stigma of being homeless, and as an attempt to 'salvage the self' (Snow and Anderson, 1993). The finding also concurs with Harter *et al*'s (2005) remarks about the power of labelling. As mentioned previously in Chapter Three, definitions are acts of drawing boundaries in order to determine whether or not someone or something is in or out of a particular category (Schiff, 2003: 496). But definitions are not set in stone, and can be challenged, as they were in this study, by agentic subjects who did not feel accurately represented by the term 'homelessness'. As other studies have shown (Watson and Austerberry, 1986; Cramer, 2002) subjects do not necessarily identify with a particularly 'homeless' identity, or feel that it is a meaningful category for them (Williams, 2001) – however that may be defined – but will contradict or subvert it.

Distancing from 'Other' Homeless People

Some participants also distanced themselves from 'other' homeless people, whether a) from the same hostel or housing project, or b) imagined homeless 'others', usually revolving around the dominant stereotype of the rough sleeper.

There was a tendency amongst participants to overstate the perceived difference between themselves and, what they saw as the actual 'homeless' population. This strategy is argued to be an attempt at preserving the self, at creating a demarcation between self and other, and deflecting the stigma of homelessness to others further down the hierarchy. As well as distancing themselves from other imagined homeless individuals, participants distanced themselves from those in the same hostel/housing project. This strategy comes close to that termed 'fencing' by Kusenbach (2009: 413), as well as 'micro-othering' by Moss (2003: 85). This

entails the construction of internal differences within a given location or community (Kusenbach, 2009). For instance, some participants in this study claimed that others in their project would 'play on' their problems to gain advantages or additional support. This mirrors Kusenbach's (2009: 413) finding that residents constructed 'more nuanced, localised boundaries to justify their own placement on the good side of the decency divide'. This section strengthens the argument that the women's rejection of the homelessness label was not simply due to a difference in definition – classifying homelessness as rough sleeping and therefore not seeing themselves as such – but was a significant distancing technique.

Some participants deflected the stigma of homelessness onto imagined homeless strangers 'on the proverbial other side of the tracks' (Kusenbach, 2009: 408). The 'real' homeless were those who were rough sleeping and participants felt 'lucky' in comparison to these unfortunate 'others'. As Tori said:

I don't see myself as homeless. I'm lucky. I'm not on the street. You're homeless when you're on the street. It might be like a charity place or whatever but... but got a roof over my head (Tori).

In this quote, Tori confirmed the differences between herself as someone with 'a roof over [her] head', and those who she considered homeless, those who conformed to the stereotypical 'homeless person' on the street. In contrast, Tori did not fall into this category and therefore did not deserve the label of 'homelessness' and its associations. Notable similarities were found among other participants. Katie, for instance, echoed Tori's perceptions, that the word 'homeless' applied to those on the streets:

...D'you know how I see the word 'homeless'? I see that word 'homeless' for people who are living on the street, rather than in 'ere. Because this place to everybody 'ere, it's their home at minute. That's how it is. And you move on from this home to another home. I see 'homeless' as people that are like camping out in bus stations and stuff like that (Katie).

The word 'homeless' could not apply to Katie because she felt that she had a home at the hostel. The designation, 'homeless', belonged to those who were living on the

streets, or camping out in bus stations. Whereas living in the hostel was considered homely for Katie, sleeping rough was the other side of the spectrum, notably un-homely. While Katie refused that the label could ever be used with respect to her hostel, the term 'homeless' could certainly be used for *other* people, in other situations and places. It was also used by other participants to refer to people in other hostels, as by Gretel for instance:

Lindsey: What does the word 'homeless' mean to you?

Gretel: Sleeping on roofs or in alleys.

L: So do you see yourself as fitting into that definition?

G: If I lived in Abbey House or HLA then I would be... I'd be homeless. 'Cause that's... I don't know, they're shit, they are proper for homeless people. I'm lucky really....In 'ere it's not like that. I don't like to think about it really. Fucking people who come out of HLA and that... 'cause my friend works at HLA and that and they like... they're all on game and on smack, and go out robbing and jail and that lot there.... The Centre doesn't let people in who've got, who are really high risk, I think, like they wouldn't let anyone in who's on smack or whatever. Whereas they do... (Gretel).

Gretel, here, drew on widely used stereotypes which symbolised homelessness, as she described other 'shit' hostels, which were 'proper for homeless people', in which residents were considered to be criminals and ex-prisoners who were 'on the game' and/or addicted to smack. These other hostels were inhabited by 'homeless people' - of whom Gretel was not one. These hostels were different from the one Gretel occupied, which she felt lucky to be in. The use of dominant stereotypes was also notable in an interview with Jo:

I'm still classed as working... I'm off sick from work. So I'm not like the normal homeless person that you think. (1)

When you think of 'homeless', I always think of a bum. I know that sounds horrible but... somebody pushing a shopping cart round street with their belongings. And I'm classed as homeless.... but when you think of homeless people you think of people out on the street. (2)

Jo made it clear that she was 'classed as working' and this, she pointed out, distinguished her from 'the normal homeless person', which resembled an attempt at placing herself firmly in the camp of the worthy and deserving. In the latter quote, Jo drew on the ancient (yet evidently still persistent) stereotype of the

homeless person as a 'bum' or a 'bag lady', 'pushing a shopping cart round street'. This finding reflects Goffman's (1963: 107-108) observations that stigmatised groups have adopted and internalised 'the norms of wider society'.

There was also evidence of passing the stigma down 'the social pecking order to even more subordinate people' (Kusenbach, 2009: 407). Thus far, participants have drawn demarcations between themselves, as deserving and adamantly not homeless, and homeless, deviant, morally suspect 'others' in other hostels and on the streets. Participants interestingly drew on dominant stereotypes of homeless people to establish that they were definitely not like them. This is a widely recognised stigma-management technique used by a range of discredited groups (Edwards, 2004; Kusenbach, 2009), which is arguably employed to 'bolster... social status and salvage... moral respectability' (Kusenbach, 2009: 423).

As well as drawing boundaries between themselves and imagined, distant 'others', participants also differentiated themselves from homeless people within their own community, hostel or housing project. Often this could be seen as an attempt to 'justify their own placement on the good side of the decency divide' (Kusenbach, 2009: 413); to secure their status as deserving; and to distinguish themselves from those perceived to be 'letting the side down'.

Jo described the difference between herself and other residents in the hostel by emphasising the variance in their routines:

I still keep quite a normal routine 'cause I'm used to working, I've worked for the last ten years of my life. So I'm used to getting up at... even now, I'll go to bed at like, two o'clock in the morning, get up at eight. 'Cause I need my routine. And here, you've got people partying 'til half past six in the morning (Jo).

Jo's sense of respectability came from her history of working; through identifying as a 'worker' she bucked the stereotype of the 'undeserving poor' (Katz, 1997) and dissociated herself from the long-term unemployed. This resonates with conclusions by Boydell *et al* (2000), who found participants to identify strongly with their past work identities. Going to bed at a reasonable hour rather than

'partying 'til half past six in the morning', like other residents, was yet another way Jo established herself as a member of the respectable group. Jo reinforced this distance by later referring to other hostel residents as 'vampires'; this classification was rooted in their behaviour: 'I'm not like the typical person in here... I say they're vampires in here, 'cause they stop up all night and go to sleep all day'. Later in the interview, Jo juxtaposed her perception of others as 'bums' with her perception of herself as 'quite get-up-and-go'. Jo distanced herself from others' behaviour and in turn, other hostel residents ('I'm not like the typical person in here').

Another example of this distancing strategy is seen in the following passage from an interview with Frankie. Frankie was living on her own in a one-bedroom flat provided by the housing project in an inner-city suburb, giving her more independence than most residents:

F: She said 'Where do you live?' I said 'it's temporary; it's just here, number 56'. She said 'I'll tell them'. And I thought 'gosh, this is really strange, you know'. And I said 'It's a bit rough though'. She said 'No, Frankie, I was brought up here'. I said 'So you know Jasmin? And Imran?' She said 'Yeah! We used to go get sweets from them and everything'. I thought 'gosh'. She said 'but that's where Milford Square used to be'. And she pointed it out to me. You know where Jasmin's is? That road going up there.

L: Yeah...

F: That's the square... Milford Square. I said 'What?! There?' I said 'Never in my wildest dreams! I never thought I'd be living near Milford Square!' Honestly, it made me feel so dirty (Frankie).

In this passage, Frankie distanced herself from her community, her area, and her situation. Milford Square had a reputation in the local area for its past association with street sex workers, being one of the former 'red light districts' of the city. Frankie described how when she first moved there, she saw the area as 'rough' and that living near the square made her feel 'dirty'. Coming from a middle-class background, Frankie was still in disbelief at her current living situation and made efforts to assert that it was only 'temporary'. During a later interview, Frankie repeated this feeling, and stated that living in the area is 'not me':

At times, when I walk around here, I think 'What on earth are you doing here?' It's like a reality check, you know. I think 'What on earth are you doing here?' It's not me. But then I think 'Frankie, you're just getting help' (Frankie).

As this example shows, fences can be built between people and places as well as between groups of people. Frankie distanced herself from the area, which she did not in any way identify with or feel she belonged to ('it's not me'), by constantly reminding herself that it's only 'temporary' and she is 'just getting help'.

Frankie also engaged in distancing from some of the other service users in the same housing project, believing that some 'play on' their illnesses or other issues to receive more support:

But you've got men in there who play on it, they play on... the first thing I've noticed on a lot of the men, well, a few of the men have said, 'I've got schizophrenia'. Now if you've got schizophrenia, I don't know, I could be wrong, you don't say you've got it because I've, I think I've told you about my auntie's son... he's got schizophrenia now, he won't admit that to anybody. (1)

I think some of them do tend to play on it and the staff do make acceptances for them and I think well, you get genuine people but the males tend to... the males tend to be more recognised, I would say, than the females because when they raise their voices and start abusing, verbally abusing, that to me should be sorted... (2)

I've got an instinct that he knows what he's doing. If you know what I mean, I'm not saying that he's not ill, that's not a problem, he takes drugs... (3)

In these examples, Frankie separates herself from some of the other service users in the housing project who 'play on it' to get what they want. Frankie constructed her identity as different and separated herself from the stigmatised identity culturally linked with homelessness. As this section has shown, Frankie also separated herself from her current place of residence, feeling that she did not belong there, and asserting its temporary nature. Both Frankie and Jo did not identify themselves as belonging to either the hostel or housing project, and did not accept that identity for themselves but distanced themselves from it: through

pointing out differences, and reminding themselves that they would soon be leaving.

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter started from the premise that home and identity were linked, albeit in intricate and nuanced ways, as Chapter Five illustrated. It was posited that there were two types of homelessness, as inferred by the women's narratives: the first, 'homelessness', was a label, an official designation that the women used as a functional device to access services and support. While it resulted in provision of accommodation, and often, the re-creation of 'home' and 'family', it was still a source of stigma because of how the label was perceived (and is perceived by society), because hostel accommodation is still not thought of as the norm, and because the label was ill-fitting (many of the women did not see themselves as home-less because the hostel was more homely than previous houses). The second type of homelessness was 'home-lessness'; the loss or absence of a home-feeling, which for many women, took effect when they were housed with biological family members before becoming officially 'homeless' and was often the result of breakdowns in familial relations.

Both 'homelessness' and home-lessness affected the self: the first, because although women re-created home in hostels or elsewhere, they remained very aware of the stigma of homelessness, as well as the social value attached to houses and the domestic (Jules being the clearest example of this). Most still experienced homelessness as a lack, as an embodied, felt and lived fear of having to occupy a label that others devalued and that did not match their identities; the second, because it encompassed the *unheimlich*, failed and failing relationships, the domestic as oppressive and suffocating, a lack of independence and privacy, chaotic family lives, abuse, abandonment and alienation.

The women had to negotiate both types of homelessness, re-creating a home somewhere else to escape home-lessness but still having to battle with the stigma attached to 'homelessness' in safer (but non-normative) spaces. Here, we return

full circle to the difference between 'homeless' (the label) and home-less (the feeling of lacking home). For instance, Danni did not feel home-less because the hostel was her home; and yet she was forced to occupy the label of being 'homeless' because of the nature of her situation: residing in temporary supported accommodation for young 'homeless' people. Danni did not identify with the category she had been placed in because actually, she did have a home, albeit one that was not societally recognised as such. She felt the stigma of being 'homeless' (of entering a homeless hostel because of perceived judgement from others) even though she was not home-less. What was occurring here was not a distancing from being home-less (from lacking a home) as a kind of denial of one's plight, because Danni did have a home, but a distancing from the mythic label of being 'homeless', and all of the stereotyped associations it conjured and how these would be received (or not) by society.

Nevertheless, the women did not passively accept, succumb to, or 'embrace' homeless identities (Snow and Anderson, 1987) but adopted tactical identity-management techniques in the face of such (mis)categorisation. Different types of identity-work were found to be in play by participants, suggesting that stigma was not felt, experienced or responded to uniformly. For the majority, distancing strategies served to separate participants' sense of self from the stereotypes associated with homelessness. Jules' account served as a counter-narrative, signifying that different and rather diverging methods of counteracting the stigmatising discourses attached to the social identity of homelessness were at work. While this chapter has shown that many homeless women do struggle with stigma and that their identities are, to an extent, influenced by powerful external discourses and labelling as well as others' perceptions of them, it also highlighted the diversity and breadth of their experiences and techniques of managing such stigmatised identities. Within the identity categories surrounding the women in this study, the available identity possibilities were stigmatising, undesirable, and unreflective of their experiences and realities. Distancing was an active and logical response to stigma, not simply a denial of their situation. Rather than accepting a stigmatised identity, the women in this study recreated, resisted, and talked back to the categories laid out for them: 'homelessness' did not necessarily have to be

an identity category that the women occupied; and indeed if it was – as in the case of Jules – it was certainly not something to be ashamed of.

7. Making up Selves: (Re)Negotiating the Homeless Identity

7.1. Introduction

The previous chapter showed how women engaged with a stigmatised homeless identity, some normalising and others dissociating from it through distancing themselves from the label itself and from homeless 'others'. This chapter looks at how new identities were formed, how this process was carried out in relation to former identities and the context of homelessness. This chapter builds on the previous to show that many of the women, who dis-identified with their homeless status, were in the process of reforming or re-creating their former selves.

This chapter raises the question of constraint; *how free were they to do this?* By no means is every kind of identity 'up for grabs' by everyone; the interplay of social structures and discourses that constrain actors and have 'coercive power' (Durkheim, [1895] 1982: 52) must be acknowledged. This does not mean that marginalised individuals cannot employ identity performatives to navigate their social worlds at all: this interplay of agency and constraint in identity-work is something this chapter addresses.

While recognising the stigmatising discourse of homelessness, it is patronising to assume that marginalised individuals lack the creativity and agency to negotiate their identities within and against constraining social structures. As Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 16) argue, 'even the most powerful state does not monopolise the production and diffusion of identifications and categories; and those that it does produce may be contested'. Parsell (2011) concurs that people actively reject and reappropriate *imposed* identities, and as the previous chapters have shown, homeless women resist and recreate normative notions of home and labels of 'homelessness'. But this capacity to resist is thought to be different for each individual (Byrne, 2003). As Skeggs (1997: 164) posits, 'recognition, refusal to recognise, partial recognitions, disidentification, dissimulation and identification are part of the same process and may occur simultaneously or not at all'.

Feminist theorising has long been concerned with debating 'the changing nature of action in a society which, it is claimed, is becoming increasingly complex, plural

and uncertain' (McNay, 2000: 1). As McNay (2000) highlights, a renewed feminist conceptualisation of agency recognises the capacity for autonomous action in the face of overwhelming cultural sanctions and structural inequalities. The approach here understands the 'homeless' identity as something not simply imposed through stigmatising discourse, but something that may be negotiated and transformed by the individuals experiencing it. It offers scope for individual agency and goes beyond the idea of identity as fixed⁶.

Insight from Butler's (1990) concept of performativity and Goffman's (1959) depiction of the dramaturgic self and identity performance highlights that identity is negotiated and constructed through everyday presentations and performances: identity is something that people *do* rather than something that people *have*.

It is understood that individuals play an active part in this constructing and reconstructing of identities (Gergen and Gergen, 1983). The concept of the saturated self (Gergen, 1991) refers to the increase in the extent of relations in which we are increasingly engaged, which has brought with it an ever-increasing repertoire of possible subject positions and 'ways of being'. The constructed self (Gergen, 1991) refers to the view that the self can be socially constructed, particularly through the mode of narrative as presented to others in relationships. Gergen (1991) argues that as the belief in essential selves erodes away, one becomes aware of the ways in which identity can be constructed in different contexts and relationships. These theories centre on the construction of identity as a process; something that is negotiated and relational, and 'something that continues to evolve and develop in conjunction with the experiences we have throughout our life' (Kilty, 2003: 65).

Considering these theories together allows an understanding of identity as both fragmented and fluid, permitting a degree of adaptability, and allowing homeless women the opportunity to adjust and cope with their situations. At the same time,

⁶ Nevertheless, identity, for some, might not necessarily be seen, felt or spoken of as if it was fluid and multiple. Kilty (2003: 64) in her study of identity negotiation among female prisoners in the carceral context, found that individuals perceived identity as a relatively fixed construct, 'to maintain their construction and perception of self over time, thus giving them a sense of power over who they are'.

we cannot dismiss the claims of those who argue that identity-work is constrained for some nor of those who perceive identity as fixed; there is a need to move past the dichotomous understanding of identity as being either completely fixed or fluid, free or constrained, and to allow for elements of both. As Kilty posits:

It is our desire to project a sense of self as being true or real that matters. If a particular construction of self is who we believe we are and it is by this self that we live our lives, then this construction is true in the life of that individual (2003: 71-72).

This chapter employs the above identity theories as lenses to explore identity negotiation among women experiencing homelessness; women for whom it is said that 'upheavals of identity' (Shantz, 2012), accompanying physical (and sometimes social) relocation, are common. We know less about identity negotiation in individuals with stigmatised identities, and for individuals undergoing new states of being and social changes. As Meanwell (2013) posits, homelessness presents challenges for maintaining a 'positive' self-concept. This group are, by definition, marginalised and (as Chapter Six argued) stigmatised, and might need to adapt and adjust to the world around them to a greater degree than more privileged groups. As De Ward (2007) argues, homeless people are often denied access to societally significant roles due to their social location, and more extremely, as others have argued, homelessness entails a loss of self (Matousek, 1991; King *et al*, 2009). Much has been written on how organisational structures, such as various institutions, exert a strong influence over the identities of inhabitants (Goffman, 1961; Baker, 2000; Paterniti, 2000; Oselin, 2009; Meanwell, 2013).

Nevertheless, the findings from this study have shown that women experiencing homelessness do not simply acquiesce to their stigmatised status, and that despite a presumed loss of house, through 'homelessness', 'home' was re-constructed and identity re-negotiated in the context of stigma. The findings here support other studies, which report how individuals negotiate institutional identities and construct their own. Goffman (1961) found that individuals immersed within a mental asylum employed 'secondary adjustments', such as using space separated from staff to construct a sense of self. Semi-institutions, such as the homeless

shelters in this study, on the one hand, espouse (or impose) certain discourses and particular normative identities which residents are encouraged to abide by (for instance, engaging in the activities on offer; looking for a job; being a 'responsible citizen'); and on the other – from a more optimistic perspective – provide opportunities for individuals to engage, develop skills, and foster a sense of belonging (Snow *et al*, 2013), all of which open up a space for people 'to create other identities and to showcase these identities as a way of countering and challenging the stigmatised identity' (Snow *et al*, 2013: 122).

Because identities are not static, it is important to explore how identities change and how they are negotiated among women experiencing homelessness. This chapter also explores how experiencing homelessness can alter, reformulate or potentially entrench an individual's identity and conception of selfhood. This chapter argues that homeless women construct a range of identities and put forward their own definitions of self against the discourse of homelessness. Participants' enacted identities challenged the familiar and wholly stigmatising categories of homelessness. Other chapters found that homelessness can be a key part of identity (some embrace it, re-appropriate it, reject it, and respond to it) but it is not the 'be all and end all'. Women also showed a side distinct from their homelessness.

This chapter consists of three main sections, each presenting a key finding. Section 7.2 draws on the notion of recreating self – some participants perceived their homelessness as a chance to reinvent themselves – and focuses on the construction of identity as a process. The next section looks at how participants constructed identity by drawing on different elements of their routines and interests to assert an 'active, busy self' and a 'worker identity'. These identities were constructed as being different to who they were before the women became 'homeless' (in Gretel's case), and at the same time, were distinct from their 'homelessness'. The final section explores how participants talked about their selves as being different in different contexts and around different people.

7.2. Re-Creating Self

This section focuses on the idea of identity as a process; something negotiated which evolves in conjunction with experiences we have throughout life. The stereotypical view of homeless people portrays them as passive, lazy, disaffiliated and disempowered (Cohen and Wagner, 1992). Matousek (1991) argues that homelessness is associated with a profound loss of self. This chapter maintains that while homelessness brings with it challenges to identity, it does not mean that one must passively succumb to this loss. Homeless women actively negotiated a new self out of the old, in part *because* of the challenges associated with homelessness. A number of variations in this strategy were found: participants rejected aspects of their former selves, almost pushing these inwards, to allow for a newly negotiated self to be on display; many women used their homelessness as a catalyst to move on, better themselves and start afresh; at the same time, some women emulated elements of their former lives, attempting to cope with changes by sticking to past routines.

The findings in this chapter have implications for thinking about Giddens' (1991) 'project of the self', which emphasises the inescapability of thinking about identity in late modernity and how it is done in a reflexive manner, in relation to homeless or marginalised groups. Jenkins (2004: 12) insists that what Giddens (1991) terms the 'reflexive project of the self' is simply not something in which we are all engaged. As emphasised in Chapter Two, thinking about (and indeed working on) one's identity may in fact be prompted by 'things to fret about', or 'an essential problem [that] arises that calls one's habitual character into question' (Boydell *et al*, 2000: 28), such as homelessness. As Matousek (1991) posits, homelessness itself presents a 'spiritual challenge' which prompts one to define one's very existence.

The term, 're-creating self', is borrowed from Meadows-Oliver (2006). Meadows-Oliver (2006) described a common theme – 're-creating self' – wherein pregnancy and childbirth were seen by the women as a time to reinvent themselves. In a similar vein, women in this study felt that their experience of difficult situations,

surrounding their homelessness, had contributed to the creation of a new and 'improved' self. Similar to Shantz (2012: 176), the women in this study altered their attitudes to cope with the challenge of homelessness, often saying that they had become a 'stronger person' as a result: 'women whose life journeys included these challenges, but who had also changed their attitudes or outlooks to cope with these events, however, frequently accepted their challenges and expressed optimism and hope about their lives and futures'. This section will proceed to explore how participants talked about a different past and present self, and spoke of their homelessness as a chance to move forward, start afresh and create a 'new' self.

Reforming and Recreating the Self

Several participants felt that experiencing homelessness, and all that led up to it, gave them a deeper understanding of life, and the tools and wisdom to cope better, to develop a stronger self. Homelessness in this sense was seen as a learning process. As Frankie said: 'you do harden up a little bit. I wouldn't say harden up, but you get wise.... you get very very wise to, y'know, the way people... I don't know, their mannerisms...' When faced with adversity, Frankie learnt to wise up, especially in relation to understanding people's motives and not being taken advantage of. Frankie later compared herself to a 'knight in armour': 'I think no one can touch me 'cause I'm hidden inside here so no one can hurt me anymore. And if you want to, I've got this iron armour on so can't touch me. I don't get hurt'. Frankie often repeated a phrase in interviews – 'but you live and learn and if you don't learn from it, there's something not quite right. You're a fool to yourself, aren't you?' This idea of 'living and learning' summed up Frankie's attitude to dealing with difficult situations in life, including her experiences of and routes to homelessness; that difficult situations are somewhat character building and transforming. Shantz (2012) makes reference to similar negotiations and navigations of the social world as 'resilience'. Shantz (2012) sees resilience as a type of 'technology of the self', enabling individuals to cope with adversity. The adverse situation of homelessness has made Frankie a stronger person, able to deal with hardships.

Taking more control over life and becoming independent since becoming homeless was a theme prominent in Jenny's story. Since Jenny moved into the hostel from her family home, she felt that she had the space to be more independent:

I've got my own... I structure my life like I was thinking about creating a rota the other day, 'cause you know, I just thought... I have more control. At home, I did feel a bit free at home but I didn't because I was like, you've gotta work around your family like if I wanted to go out, I'd need to make sure that someone else goes out or I take my sisters with me or... you know, so it's fair... but here, I'm different because I'm my own person, nothing's holding me back (Jenny).

Moving into the hostel and becoming officially defined as 'homeless' reinforced Jenny's independence. A change in environment and situation, which may be unsettling for some, was eventually dealt with by adapting to a self which fits in with this environment: a young woman able to cope well without having her family around.

Several participants spoke of becoming calmer since moving into the hostel or supported accommodation, almost a reformed version of their former selves. For instance:

And then I moved back in 'ere and since then I think I've calmed down a lot 'cause I used to have a really bad attitude as well. And I needed help with anger issues but... it kinda calmed down a bit. So I think it was just... I don't know... but I finally got there eventually. I used to get right emotional at times as well though. So... but yeah I'm fine now the way I am so... (Danni)

L: Yeah, I understand, yeah... Erm, and how do you think your housing situation's changed you... like are you changed now from where you were in the past?

T: Yeah, miles, a lot. I'm a lot more chilled out. Erm... well, I can't really say that 'cause it was only a couple of months ago that I got arrested so I can't really say I'm not getting arrested anymore or 'owt like that but I am much better. Say if someone kicked off at me before, right, someone got in my face and said... well... started shouting in my face, I'd be like 'get out my face' or that's it... and if they didn't get outta my face, straight bang whallop. Now I'm like I have to grit my teeth, try and walk away. I find it hard. It's very hard. I did it other day look [*shows me bruised knuckles*]... but shhh, 'cause I'll get done for that. I couldn't help it. It's just summat I've always done, I need to just stop doing it (Tori).

And my family have noticed a difference in me. They've said I've changed since I've been here (Jo).

Yeah, I have proper changed me, I used to be really wild. Just used to get jobs, quit jobs, get another job next week, moving about all time, going out all time and doing... going on mad adventures, fucking biking it to Lorbeach. Just mad stuff like that. Now, I just... I've got focus now. I've grown up I think (Gretel).

... it's changed me in... different ways because I had like...I had a bit of an anger problem. And when I was with a partner, again, I ended up shoving my foot straight through a glass table. I ended up getting rushed to hospital so... but that's because he was pushing his luck a bit, and he knew exactly what he was doing. And he knew that I had like, an anger problem and that so... he just tried his best and he saw what I became, with my anger and that. But apart from my anger business, I think I've been okay. 'Cause it's calmed down a hell of a lot. I used to punch hell out of walls and... doors, drawers, and lot. I used to feel angry inside, I used to punch hell out of it. I used to think in my head that I'm punching hell outta punch bag but it's not. And then I ended up going to hospital and having like a bandage round my wrist, 'cause of swelling and that. They just told me that I damaged tissue in my hand. But they said I was very lucky that I hadn't broke it. 'Cause thing is, I've broke it before. Well, broke them two little fingers. But all they could do for them two was put 'em in a sling. But apart from that, erm... yeah, apart from that I was very lucky. But now I've just got a scar from where my foot went straight through table (Bella).

Moving into the hostel provided participants with an environment of support, which allowed them to develop clarity of focus, structure, and determination, whereas in the past, the overriding way of dealing with adversity was through anger. It is notable here that all of these participants were, at the time, residing in a hostel, suggesting that quasi-institutions have an influence over the identities of their inhabitants (Oselin, 2009).

There is also a sense of 'profaning the past [self] to salvage the present' (Meanwell, 2013: 439). For their stay in the homeless hostels to make sense, participants constructed stories of past selves in need of reforming and correction; angry selves that needed improvement. In Meanwell's (2013) study with homeless shelter residents, recognising the 'mistakes' and 'weaknesses' of the past self was seen as a necessary step in making sense of the present and moving towards a more promising future. Meanwell (2013: 6-7) found that the shelter provided residents with 'resources to construct autobiographical narratives of their lives leading up to the shelter stay that were consistent with the present shelter stay and a sense of

worthiness'. This tendency also comes close to what Bott (2006) describes as the 'alter self': participants referred to a secondary subjectivity; that person they would be if they had not sought support and reformed, and this served as an important reminder to persevere:

That's how... I just used to take myself off 'cause I wasn't bothered. I used to go into hotels and secretly drink. And I'm not talking cider, I'm talking neat bottles of Bacardi, vodka, neat... And I can't... I won't do that anymore, I don't even want to do that anymore. 'Cause it's not doing anything for me. Not doing anything for me at all, it's just making me feel 'why are you doing it? You're better than that' I look at that thing and I think 'I'm better than it'. I'm better. (Frankie)

I hit rock bottom, to be honest. Erm, lost that house there 'cause it was a mother's and baby's house... come here... erm, I was a bit bad on some drugs when I was like here but then I chilled out a lot. 'Cause it's like if I'm in a place like this, I'm taking drugs, no one's gonna respect me. And they'll not... I do want respect... so it's like I had to sort that out. Plus, I've lost my son... so I... and I needed him. So I just had to turn it all round. (Tori)

Frankie's 'alter-self' was spoken of as someone who secretly drank. Frankie referred to this version of herself in an objectifying manner, not as a 'she' but an 'it', serving to further increase the distance between who she was then and who she is now. Tori saw her 'alter-self' as someone unworthy of others' respect, and it was this judgement of how she thought others would see her that acted as motivation to change, 'to turn it all round'. A final way that the self was transformed through homelessness was through becoming enlightened, in terms of opening participants' eyes to the realities of homelessness and becoming less judgemental of people who experience it. This was particularly apparent in the case of Jules, for whom homelessness made her more 'grounded as a person' and less judgemental of others:

I think being homeless has made me... I am quite a strong person anyway 'cause, like, I've been through quite a lot. But I think being homeless... it's made me more grounded as a person, I think (1).

I think because like if I hadn't have been in hostels before I was put in prison... I hate saying that, it sounds like I've murdered somebody. And I haven't. Like yeah, I think I would have been not as prepared but because I've lived in hostels and I've been around different people, I was kind of, I knew what I

was gonna expect kind of. And when I... I don't judge anybody, like, I've got friends from different backgrounds, like, I've got some friends that have been to uni, I've got some friends who have got kids, I've got a few friends that are recovering alcoholics or they've been on drugs. Like I don't judge people (2).

In contrast to many studies on homelessness and identity (Snow and Anderson, 1987; Boydell *et al*, 2000), which have argued that current homeless identities tend to be devalued by homeless participants, this section has found that it was past alter selves that were profaned. Homelessness represented a chance for women to turn their lives and selves around, 'toughening them up' or making them wiser; enlightening them, giving them a greater sense of independence; and reforming and recreating troubled past selves into new, emergent identities.

Getting the 'Old' Self Back

This section focuses on Frankie, who as well as 'toughening up' through homelessness also attempted to reform by reverting back to an 'old' identity, at a time in her life, prior to her alcoholism and homelessness, when she perceived things were going well. Similar to a finding by DeGloma (2010), Frankie split the past and present into separate personas, creating a 'temporally divided self'. This differed from other participants in that it did not entail recreating the self as such, but rather reverting back to an imagined past self, or what Mead (1929) refers to as 'the symbolically reconstructed past' self. This strategy is not achievable in the sense that the past self can be gotten back in its original state, nor can we shut out everything that has happened to shape our selves since this time; as Gergen and Gergen (1983: 255) state, 'one's present identity is... not a sudden and mysterious event, but a sensible result of a life story'. Whether achievable or not, Frankie's strategy of looking back to a past identity to reform the present self is still a form of identity negotiation. As Maines *et al* (1983: 163) posit, the symbolic reconstruction of the past 'involves redefining the meaning of past events in such a way that they have meaning in and utility for the present'.

Frankie, although only taking what she saw as small steps, finally felt proud of being able to leave the house to buy ingredients to cook with, after suffering from acute agoraphobia (see *Figure 15*):

But now, obviously, I'm developing now. The soreness is going, the rawness is going, and I'm getting a bit of my identity back. I don't want to say a lot because I don't want to push it. I don't want to tempt fate. But that's what I'm proud of: I can actually go out and think about what I'm going to cook (Frankie).



Figure 15: Photograph by Frankie

Frankie described this process as 'getting a bit of [her] identity *back*'. This statement presumes that identity is something that Frankie had in the past but had lost somewhere along the way and is now lacking; something that needs to be found again. Reverting back to a more 'positive' old self came up again in a later interview with Frankie:

And it's because if you've lost your confidence for a long, long time you come to a stand-still so it's a long process. I don't know, it might suddenly go 'Whhoo' and come out, you know, and be back to me, be what I used to be like. I said to Farrell the other day, 'You don't really know me, Farrell, do you?' He said 'What do you mean?' I said 'Well, you don't really know me'. I said 'How do you see me?' He said 'In your pyjamas'. I said 'But do you know, normally, in my past, yeah, I know it's gone, I could get dressed up three times a day'. You know, I could go to the gym, come back, have a shower, go and pick Jake up, that's another change, and it depended if I was going out again, that's another change. You know, or there could be a day where, just a summer's

day, just go training, come back, do the garden, make it all nice, and invite some friends over for a barbeque (Frankie).

In this quote, Frankie conveyed a longing to become the confident self that she selectively recalled from her past. She believed that her then current partner did not really 'know' her since he had never known who she 'really' was, her present self is 'unknowable': her past confident, active self, who would 'get dressed up three times a day' to accommodate her busy social schedule. She speculated that her past confidence, her past self might return one day, 'it might suddenly go 'Whoooh' and come out, you know, and be back to me, be what I used to be like'.

This finding fits with other similar studies: by Boydell *et al* (2000), for instance, which found that participants described their past identities in considerably positive terms – 'homeless individuals cling to selves situated in the past' (Boydell *et al*, 2000: 30); and by Biernacki (1986) who found that heroin addicts reform without treatment by transforming their identities to those of 'normal' people, partly done by reverting to an old identity.

As Frankie found change, and being frequently physically relocated, to be disorientating –

I went across the road from where the Courthouse is and I got a lift there. I was so... I just didn't know where I was. The drink didn't help! But even so, if I hadn't have had a drink, I would've been quite unaware of where I was going, it was all new to me (1)

And just literally crying all the time; couldn't sleep; I was scared because I'd got people knocking on the door and men jumping through the window... oh gosh! I was a nervous wreck (2)

– attempting to retreat to a more 'positive' past self was one way of resisting these unsettling changes in place and identity as she became defined as 'homeless'.

Frankie's assertions complicate matters somewhat in relation to conceptualising identity as fluid. For Frankie, 'identity' was inherently positive: if she was not the person she wanted to be (her past, confident self), she had *lost* her identity.

Frankie saw her past self as somehow more 'her', more 'real' than who she was in the present. This echoes Kilty's (2003) observation that individuals who come out of depressions frequently describe that they are attempting to return to their 'real personas', 'that had been muddled as a result of their depression' (Kilty, 2003: 71). As Kilty (2003: 71) argues, we cannot simply dismiss such claims of a real, true concept of an essential self as mistaken or 'ignorant of the relational component of identity'. As Kilty (2003: 72) states, 'allowing for a fixed notion of selfhood amidst the fragmentation of identity generates a space for real resistance'. Frankie's fixation with an authentic self errs closely with the conception of identity as singular in modern western society. Because Frankie did not feel that her current self as homeless and other things reflected this imagined authentic selfhood, she saw herself as a person without self. Of course, conceptions of selfhood have moved on since this time (as Chapter Two showed) and Frankie does of course still have a self-identity, albeit one that is clearly reconstructed and different to the one in the past. Still, Frankie did not see it this way, suggesting that 'the demand for valid and authentic selfhood persists' (Ferguson, 2009: 65).

This section has shown how Frankie drew on elements of her past self in order to self-care through the tumultuous experience of homelessness. This finding suggests that identity, although conceptualised as plural, may be thought of as fixed and stable by some. Although recreating the self may be transforming for some homeless women, Frankie positioned her identity in the past, by reverting back to the 'real' past self, which also brought with it a sense of stability, and a method of coping.

7.3. Identity Pegs: Constructing a Non-Homeless Identity?

Goffman (1963) defines an 'identity peg' as a pre-imposed set of characteristics and stereotypes placed upon an individual by others. This relates to Goffman's (1963) assertion that symbols operate as indicators of social information, either confirming or denying social identity assumptions. As a result, Snow *et al* (2013: 120) argue, 'the stigmatised individual must manage both the presentation of him – or herself – as well as the presumed identity placed on him or her by the

stigmatising identity peg'. There is an assumption in Goffman's (1963) work that homeless people 'are denied... methods of self-worth development' (De Ward, 2007: 4); that when one is prescribed an identity peg, the stigmatised identity is one's only and true identity; that identity pegs can only be prescribed to us by others and not shaped by the self; and that one is stuck with it for life and can do nothing to change it.

This does not take into account the more recent scholarly position that people create multiple identities through the various roles and opportunities that they have (Scheff, 2007). Further, as Jacobs (2013: 5) states: 'strengths cannot be recognised if the lens through which we try to understand homelessness is clouded with deficit perspectives'.

There is a need to move on from focusing solely on the passivity and helplessness of homeless (or any stigmatised) individuals to exploring their strengths, and capacity for agency and resistance. Following Gergen and Gergen (1983: 255), this thesis understands identity to be concerned with 'active becoming' rather than 'passive being'. As such, this section argues that an individual can also present and create *non-stigmatising* identity markers – identity pegs – which counter the stigmatising ones and allow the individual to have agency over the construction of personal identity.

The homeless participants in this study fashioned their own self-identities as something other than (and as well as) those imposed on them through stigmatising homelessness stereotypes and discourse. These identity pegs often came in the form of props. Many of the women's narratives and photographs highlighted certain objects that stood in for an active and busy self. Through pursuing routines, activities and interests, participants could 'try on' different identities (Snow *et al*, 2013: 122). Another self to emerge was what is termed here as the 'worker identity'. Some participants were quick to define themselves as 'workers', 'not like the normal homeless person that you think' (Jo). Both of these identity constructions work to maintain an individual's identity as something other than 'homeless', whilst going through a turbulent and transitory period.

Participants created definitions of self that distinguished them from those imposed by dominant discourse; as something else other than (and as well as) 'homeless' and all of the negative stereotypes the label connotes. The overlap with the previous chapter on stigma and its management must be noted here: identities can be constructed and 'made up' by individuals but experiencing the stigma and dislocation of homelessness may have a significant influence over the kind of identities which are constructed at the time. Being cast into a stigmatising label and thrust into a challenging, unsettling situation may prompt an individual to focus on other aspects of their identities – or to construct a 'positive' self – as a method of coping or as a resistance to that stigma. Ensuing discussion explores the two sub-themes – the 'active, busy self' and 'worker identities' – through delving into empirical work.

'The Active, Busy Self'

Homelessness often entails – as it did in many of the women's lives in this study – physical removal and relocation from usual daily routines, which can represent a major assault on one's identity. As Shantz (2012: 166) posits, 'sudden (often undesired) upheavals of identity alter the smooth course of the women's lives and leave them feeling lost'. As Section 6.2 showed, homelessness did affect the self, as an embodied, felt and lived experience, with participants' grief being a key structuring principle of their home-lessness and 'homelessness'. However, while homelessness did affect identity, it did not lead to a complete loss of self, or a sense of resignation. It did in some cases act as an opportunity to 'turn the self around'. This section explores how participants drew on different elements – props – of their routines and interests to stand in for personal identity. In identifying with these markers of identity, homeless women resisted the labels associated with homelessness and marginalisation.

It was clear from Jenny's narrative and photographs that she defined herself in terms of the activities she pursued. Her photographs depict a basketball, a guitar, recording equipment, and song lyrics (see *Figures 16 - 19*).

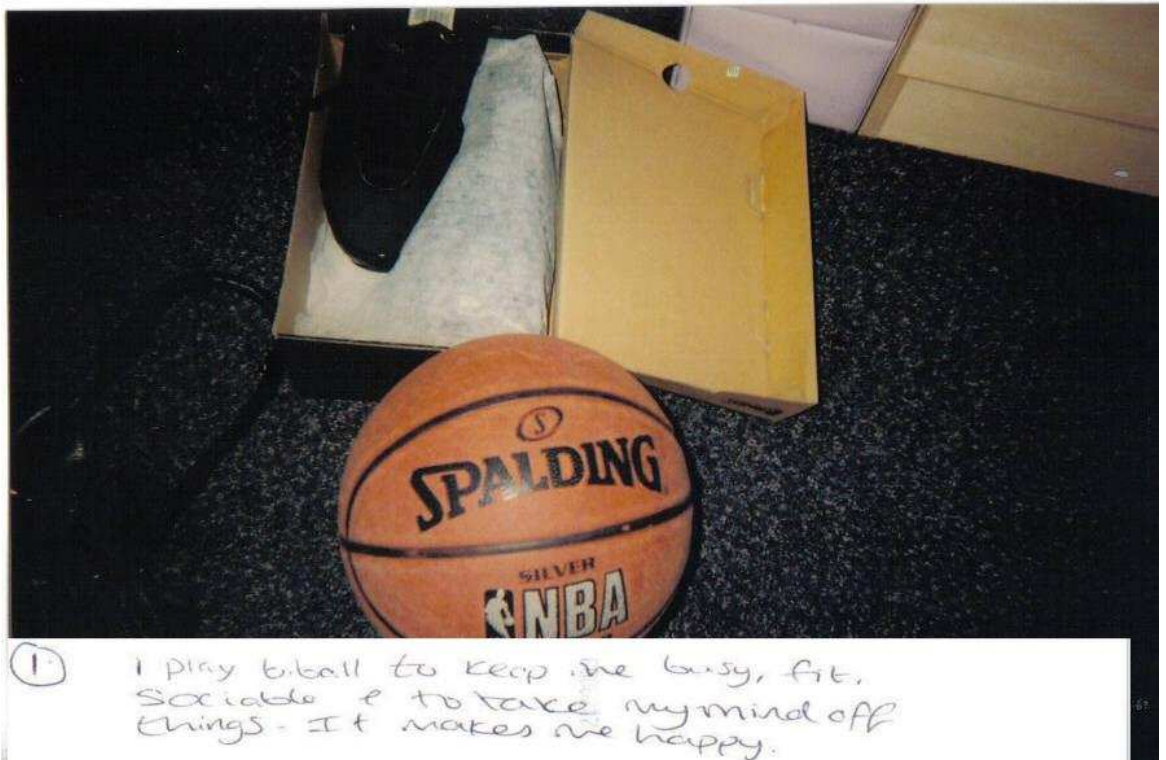
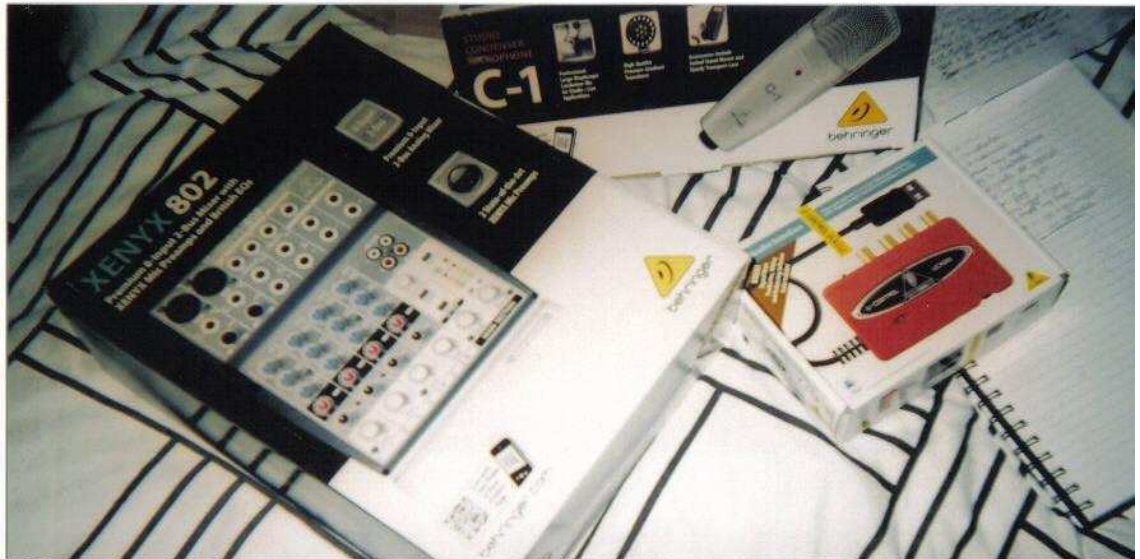


Figure 16: Photograph by Jenny



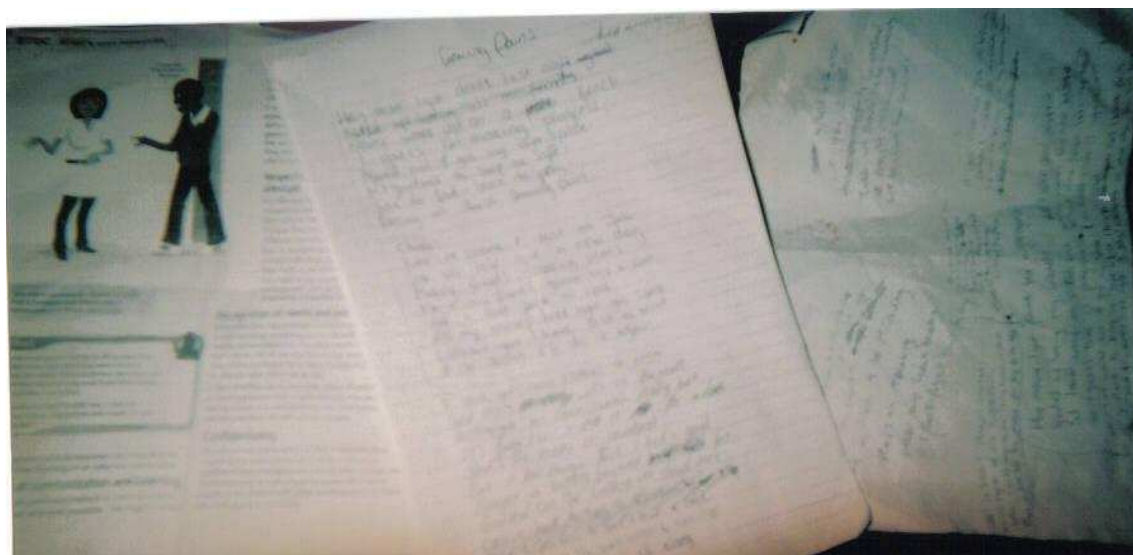
② This is my guitar, I play
it ~~to~~ make music &
express how I feel.

Figure 17: Photograph by Jenny



③ This is my music equipment that I recieved through a talent bond. I am soon going to have a mini studio in my room to make music which I love.

Figure 18: Photograph by Jenny



(4) This picture shows a Song I've written and coursework sheet from college. I was trying to study and got distracted to write a song.

Figure 19: Photograph by Jenny

Jenny recounted how her typical day was a busy day:

...it's normally college and then work on a night. And then if I'm not working, it's like writing songs or going to see my mum and kids, or summat like that. So a typical day for me is a busy day. Studying, working, or with friends or family really... that's my routine. It's non-stop (Jenny).

Being busy was important for Jenny, as 'if you've got no plan then sometimes it can be a little depressing because I like being busy'. Routines provided Jenny with a multitude of roles and self-identifications: 'as a pretty busy person...' who is 'always doing something'.

Jenny's guitar, recording equipment, basketball and lyrics provided identity pegs to legitimise her identity as an amateur musician and basketball player. Jenny explained the importance of playing music in the following quote:

I can relate to music, it's... I like it... I enjoy it... erm, it's just me time, one hour of me time, when I just wanna see how I feel, I'd rather just play a song and just sing away to myself (Jenny).

In performing these roles, Jenny succeeded in challenging routine tales of homelessness and homeless people as 'lazy', 'passive', and 'disempowered' (Boydell *et al*, 2000). In fact, it was possible for Jenny to pursue these activities and roles to a greater extent since leaving her mother's house and moving into the hostel:

...obviously my mum's health has been an issue over last couple of years... So less pressure and stuff. But erm, I just need to have my time, I think, now. First I thought it was really selfish of me. But I thought I have gotta live, you know....But yeah, so, I'm pretty happy with things now. Work in a bar in town... do that part-time. Pretty fun. Yeah, I'm a pretty busy person (Jenny).

This was repeated in Gretel's narrative:

L: Right, erm, this is more about your daily routine... like could you describe a typical day in your life? Like I know there's no typical day but... like yesterday for example...

G: ...before I came here, I just used to go to work, get pissed, go to work, get pissed... and now I don't hardly drink or I definitely don't do drugs. At weekends, like, I'll drink, but every day during week, I'm just doing stuff. I like get all my tasks done what I've gotta do in day then at night make all my t-shirts what I'm selling and draw my art stuff. Yesterday I was designing an album cover for my friend in America (Gretel).

Jenny and Gretel both described themselves (and their daily lives) as active and busy against a discourse which paints homeless persons as 'lazy bums', and serve as an antidote to pessimistic stereotypes of helplessness and dependency. Here, it is crucial to flag up Shantz's (2012) recognition of the relation between identity and one's routine and daily life. Shantz (2012: 162) states: 'examining identity leads to interrogations of *who* one is, while the latter category speaks to *what* they do'. However, Shantz still notes that the two are interrelated, and that identities often incorporate aspects of day-to-day life:

...these mundane parts of daily life... do help individuals to form a sense of self and constitute part of an identity performative, not because of what they are, but because of their repetitive and cumulative nature (2012: 162).

In other words, Shantz (2012) affirms that daily routines and self-identities are interlinked in a sense that the former help individuals to construct the latter. As

Shantz (2012) further argues, while a woman might be retired or disabled, her daily activities reinforce her identity as an 'active' person. The women in this study used participation in different activities as identity pegs to assert attributes and statuses around which they could present certain active and busy 'identity performatives' (Shantz, 2012).

Jenny's alternative self-identifications also echo Goffman's (1961: 189) 'secondary adjustments': 'personal ways of negotiating organizational categories and institutional careers that provide evidence of identity apart from institutional parameters and definitions' (Paterniti, 2000: 111). This suggests that identity is something which can be negotiated by participants, who defined themselves not through dominant depictions of homelessness, but rather in imagining their own identities in terms of their own stories of self. This chimes with Paterniti's (2000) conclusion that in everyday routines and interactions, persons lay claims about self, 'claims that liberate them from the expected social performances and possible adversity associated with "being" the social categories that others might imagine them to be' (2000: 116). This was not only confined to Jenny, but was picked up in the majority of participants' interview transcripts and photographs. For Bella and Lucy, going swimming was an important part of their routines (see *Figure 20*):

Lucy: I go swimming at St. Matthew's. I like doing some exercise, erm, me and my friend go swimming.

L: Is it something you do quite often?

Lu: Yeah, 'cause we got a free pass. So we can go any time we want. We went today as well, we went this morning... and then we might be going tomorrow or whenever.

L: So that's something you like doing?

Lu: Yeah, summat to do 'cause it's better than staying at home all time. We just go out swimming or go to friends' or... enjoy our sens [ourselves] and that... (Lucy).



Figure 20: Photographs by Lucy

Lucy noted that going swimming was 'better than staying at home all time', reiterating the idea that being active is related to a sense of 'positive' self-identity, and self-worth. Tori mentioned how she has always remained active, even when fighting a drug addiction: 'I've always... I've always been active and... worked or... 'owt like that'. Danni displayed several identities distinct from her homelessness; most notable of these was her identification as a dancer: 'I've always done dance, I've done it for you know, six years. And hopefully, I'm gonna be teaching a few residents in 'ere to dance'. Another common activity with participants was walking. As Jules said: 'I like nature and I like walking... And I just sort of saw the sky and thought, 'Oh, I'll take a photo'. It doesn't really represent anything about me, it doesn't show anything about me, but it's just something that I like... love to do'. Likewise, Jo went walking when she felt 'stressed out': 'That's what I do, I walk. I just go off on my own, don't listen to anybody and go for a walk'.

An alternative explanation may lie in the discourse around the idea of 'responsible citizenship'. Whiteford (2010: 195) argues that this vocabulary is also increasingly used in the field of homelessness. This agenda is part of a wider discourse in which 'all dependent nonlabouring populations – unemployed, disabled, and retired – have become targets of state policies to "empower" and "activate" them' (Katz, 2000: 147). While in one sense, keeping busy and active might be read as a resistance of stereotypical 'homeless identities', it might also be associated with an adherence to discourses around the 'responsible citizen' and 'meaningful activity', which tends to be upheld in many homelessness services. An element of this is evident in one of Jenny's comments, at her feelings of guilt about buying 'some cans', partly because this went against the rules of the hostel ('don't tell 'em 'cause I'm not allowed it') but also since it went against the norms of activity and productivity and the discourses of 'the responsible citizen' at work in homelessness services:

J: I went and bought some cans the other day, don't tell 'em [the hostel staff], 'cause I'm not allowed it...

L: It's ok, it's all confidential.

J: But erm, I just fancied a drink 'cause I just felt like I'd been working a lot and fancied a drink. So really I should have thought right, spend this money on food or summat but I just wanted to get drunk and that. Not like I do it all time, I just fancied it (Jenny).

However, despite Jenny's comment, there were no criticisms of regulated activities in the hostels; they were mostly accepted and welcomed. Katie wanted the hostel to organise more activities:

I think there should be more stuff, yeah. It does get a bit... you do get a bit bored at times. But then there's sometimes people that spoil it and wreck stuff and spoil stuff for you... But yeah, I think there should be other stuff to do, without a doubt. Yeah, it's like they used to have Wii night and stuff like that. Can't even remember last time that were on. 'Cook and Eat' they do every day. But, yeah, I suppose there isn't really that much, is there? (Katie).

Although participants resisted the discourses of laziness and helplessness, as well as negotiating the 'homeless identity' by taking on more active, busy roles, they were also encouraged to do so by conflicting discourses of 'meaningful activity'

within the hostels themselves. The extent to which identity negotiations were truly autonomous in this case is therefore questionable. While participants defined themselves not through dominant depictions of homelessness, but rather in imagining their identities in terms of their own stories of self, the 'stories of self' that were enacted might have been influenced, to an extent, by the direction of the homeless services, their staff and policies.

Worker Identities

Some of the participants valorised their identities as 'workers', and, in part, held these roles as 'positive' identity pegs and as something which set them apart from the stereotypes of homelessness and dependency. Holding down a job is often a role that homelessness is likely to interfere with, and young homeless people, in particular, face difficulties in finding work (Fitzpatrick, 1999). Despite this, many of the women proudly held a job, while others stressed their desire to work. Jenny, who worked part-time at a local pub, talked about gaining a sense of self-respect from being in employment. Interestingly, Jenny took a photograph of her work outfit with very little instruction being given for the photo exercise (work was never mentioned). Talking about why she took this photograph (*Figure 21*), Jenny explained:

I work really hard, erm, so it's just like I enjoy working 'cause it makes you feel like you're doing something with your life, erm, yeah, it takes your time as well. Erm, but makes you feel good as a person. I took that 'cause I wanted to show that I do work and I do work hard (Jenny).



Figure 21: Photograph by Jenny

Jenny was keen to stress that she 'do[es] work and do[es] work hard'. There is even a sense of morality in the way she spoke about it: 'it makes you feel good as a person' and 'makes you feel like you're doing something with your life'. Through adopting such a role whilst staying at the homeless hostel Jenny maintained a central social value, that of the 'work ethic', challenging society's negative attitudes towards homeless persons as 'not working hard enough' and 'deserving disadvantage', and presenting herself in a way which aligned her with conventional society and its actors. Jenny might use her account of work and identity as a 'worker' as a resource to contest the stereotype of the homeless person as 'lazy' or 'helpless' and avoid the stigma of homelessness as a loss of

identity, self-worth, and self-efficacy (Buckner *et al*, 1993). Baron and Hartnagel (1997) and Ferguson *et al* (2011: 2) also found that employment was particularly important to homeless young adults as it 'contributed to their identity formation' and allowed them to 'benefit from time structure, social contact, social context, and social identity'.

Likewise, Gretel proudly spoke of how since coming to the hostel, she had managed to set up her own t-shirt design company which was her 'dream', as well as a far cry from the jobs she used to do in the past: 'just used to get jobs, quit jobs, get another job next week'. Gretel believed that she surpassed others' (non-homeless persons') expectations by being homeless and holding down a job at the same time:

I know what they think... they think that you're lazy and you can't be arsed to get yourself out... find yourself somewhere to live... or get yourself a job... you just can't be arsed... (Gretel)

Jo defined herself as 'still classed as working... I'm off sick from work... So I'm not like the normal homeless person that you think'. Jo worked as a 'Customer Service and Sales Team Leader', which she saw as 'a good job' with 'quite high pay'.

However, as the majority of respondents were at the time struggling to find work, their 'worker identities' were either from past roles or projected into the future. These accounts often depicted participants' efforts to abide by the work ethic, despite setbacks, and still provided constructions of a 'positive' self against the odds. Leah told me of her past employment, working two jobs at once, but as her mother moved house, 'it ruined everything'. As Leah said:

I used to work at Jacques Vert in Havencrest... I used to work there, and I worked there since I was 16. And then I worked at a Chinese and a pizza place at the same time. But I had to leave that 'cause I moved. So my mum like pretty much ruined everything for me. Erm, I can't really find a job round 'ere... (Leah).

Tori did not subscribe to the 'work ethic' discourse in quite the same way as the others. Tori's ambition was to become a football coach ('just want to make my own

team in colliery team'), and since this required an intensive training regime, Tori wished to focus on this instead of taking up a part-time job against the advice of the Job Centre:

Job Centre stress me out 'cause they're like 'Get a job', and I'm like 'No, I don't wanna get a job, I wanna do...' I want my job, but they can't get it into their thick heads, they won't listen! But I guess I could get a part-time job, I just... choose not to (Tori).

As 'worker' is a culturally valued identity; placing emphasis on this aspect of the self – whether past, present or future – allowed homeless, marginalised women access to a meaningful social identity in a context in which they had 'little access to the academic degrees, high-status marriages, and rewarding professions that provide many middle- and upper-class women with gratifying social identities' (Edin and Kefalas, 2005: 171). It also acted as an 'improvement narrative', what Skeggs (1997: 82) defines as a way of 'generating, accruing and/or displaying cultural capital'. Gaining employment, especially meaningful employment, was seen as one way of improving the self (by becoming more responsible and independent) and the future.

It seems, then, that homeless women simultaneously negotiate their identities as 'active', 'busy' and 'workers' – in order to maintain a 'worthy self' (Meanwell, 2008) and a 'socially valued prosocial self' (Opsal, 2011: 139) – whilst participating in an emergent 'active society' which posits activity and the 'work ethic' as the 'positive'. This finding concurs with that of Gowan (2010), that labour and work are still significant facets of identity for those experiencing homelessness, implying that 'homeless culture' is not separated from 'the mainstream', but articulates the very notions of 'success', 'hard work', and 'productivity' implicit within it. There is also an element of Boydell *et al's* (2000: 30) observation that 'homeless individuals strive to have valued lives and selves'. Despite negotiations of identity on the part of the homeless women, these still occurred within a broader structural context, constraining the types of negotiations that can be made.

7.4. Identity Performances

A woman's subjectivity is not stabilized or essentialised by identity categories (e.g. race, class, gender) because her ways of existing in the world can shift depending on social relations, historical experiences, and material conditions (Jackson, 2004: 673).

While Frankie spoke about her identity as being relatively fixed, other participants talked about their selves as being different in different contexts and around different people. The theoretical framework guiding this thesis understands identity to be relational, as well as dependent on context and audience (Goffman, 1959) (see Chapter Two). Taking insight from Butler's (1990) theory of performativity and Goffman's (1959) 'dramaturgical model', it is argued that identity is negotiated and constructed through every day presentations and performances: identity is something that people do rather than something that people have. Goffman (1959) uses the term 'impression management' to refer to the ways in which individuals convey messages to an audience which lead to a certain assessment of the actor: 'for those present, many sources of information become accessible and many carriers (or 'sign-vehicles') become available for conveying this information' (Goffman, 1959: 13). Butler (1990) adopts a similar view of identity; focusing on gender, Butler (1990) argues that identities are not fixed ontological categories, but are rather, 'discursive constructions fashioned through the iteration of social norms' (Huey and Berndt, 2008: 181). Both Goffman (1959) and Butler (1990) view identity as a constructed phenomenon performed as everyday reality, and enacted for an audience.

The theoretical framework, in Chapter Two, takes identity to be multiple, ever-changing and fluid depending on the specific social context at the time. Applying these concepts to marginalised women, Kilty (2003) argues that the fragmentation and fluidity of identity permits them adaptability, allowing – in Kilty's (2003) example – criminalised women to adjust and cope with imprisonment. Although homeless women are allocated a stigmatised social identity – an identity possibility which may neither be desirable nor appropriate for many women experiencing homelessness – 'within this field... the possibilities for identity are never fully pre-

determined... women may continue to perform, re-form and recreate the categories as they live in and through them' (Shantz, 2012: 104). The findings in this section add that identities – even stigmatised 'homeless' identities – can change to some extent through performance (Butler, 1990).

However, it was not always as simple as 'recreating categories' (Shantz, 2012). This section also discusses the idea of access to and equality in identity negotiation for women who are marginalised and homeless. Identity was not something that was necessarily 'up for grabs' by the women, as other constraining factors came into play: money (women were often reliant on benefits, or bonds from their housing projects), confidence (knowing what is/isn't 'respectable') and independence/freedom to choose (women were assisted in their performances by key workers/the hostel's doctrine around what constitutes acceptable/unacceptable dress/behaviour).

Ensuing discussion elaborates on these theoretical concepts in relation to empirical findings relating to identity performances: how participants used dress and appearance to perform their identities; how they described acting differently in different contexts and situations; and conversely, how they saw their identities as fixed too. It also considers the issue of constraint; *to what extent are homeless women free to construct their own identities?*

Keeping up Appearances

According to Goffman (1959), appearance works to portray to the audience the performer's social status(es). In this sense, dress and props serve to communicate gender, status, occupation, age, and personal commitments. Identity can be performed through non-verbal props, such as dress, gesture, and appearance (Goffman, 1959). Stone (1962: 216) asserts that clothing and appearance are key to the 'formation of the conception of the self'. Similar to Goffman (1959), Stone (1962) notes that appearance communicates to others an individual's 'programs', which are reviewed, either validating or challenging the self. Davis (1992: 25) maintains that dress can serve as 'a kind of visual metaphor for identity...

registering the culturally anchored ambivalence that resonates with and among identities'. In other words, there are various tensions between personal and social identity, and dress plays a part in the ways in which women experiencing homelessness distance themselves from their social 'homeless' identity label.

Nevertheless, the theory that dress is a marker of identity implies that individuals need access to resources to be able to construct or perform a desirable identity through clothing, style, or appearance (Croghan *et al*, 2006). Homeless women – whether 'sofa surfing', staying in a hostel, or temporary supported accommodation – tend to have restricted access to economic as well as material resources (many having made a quick exit from their former 'homes' and bringing limited possessions with them as a consequence). Casey *et al* (2008: 906) nonetheless found physical presentation and behaviour to be of importance to the homeless women in their study, in order to 'blend in' through adopting expected behaviour and dressing neatly in public spaces. While some of the women in this study used clothing and appearance as a way of negotiating their identities, and resisting their homeless and marginalised status, it must also be recognised that this was done in light of limited access.

Discussion now turns to the women's words themselves to explore how their identities were performed through appearance and dress. Firstly, the application of make-up was referred to by two women (Frankie and Jo) as a way of constructing and maintaining respectable identities.

Frankie invited me to meet her key-worker from the housing project to explain my research. We were due to set off after the interview, which took place in Frankie's flat. During the gap between the interview finishing and setting off to the housing project, Frankie spent a while getting ready, working on her appearance, stating: 'I'll start putting some lipstick on... I can't go up like this... they'll think 'who's this?!'... 'Who is this? We don't recognise this person'. It was clear that Frankie placed a high value in her appearance and image; leaving the house without wearing make-up was something which would risk tarnishing this.

As Frankie came from a fairly affluent, middle-class background, maintaining an immaculate appearance might have been a continuation of middle-class respectability (Skeggs, 1997) performed prior to becoming homeless; a way of emulating previous elements of her former life, and, as mentioned before, reverting back to an 'old' identity, at a time in her life when Frankie perceived things were going well.

For Jo, working on her appearance was a way of 'feeli[ing] a bit better' about herself, so that she could 'go out and do stuff' rather than just 'lay[ing] there [in bed] all day'. To not carry out these rituals would be akin to 'letting herself go' ('otherwise you're just gonna sink back into it') and risking slippage back into her more depressed state: Jo was diagnosed with Generalised Anxiety Disorder.

Dress also came up as a means of performing various identities for the women in the study, although not all women felt comfortable in conforming to a 'smart/business-like' appearance. Bella told me how she lacked confidence in her appearance, especially with choosing clothes for herself:

I only like, I just try em on, and just took photos of me sen [myself] wearing 'em to see what I look like. Erm, 'cause I ant really got that confidence of wearing clothes, wearing clothes to see if I look big or if I look fat in 'em. I haven't got the confidence like that kind of thing, erm, but there I think I look alreet because the jeans aren't too tight, they're a size bloody 14, 'cause my bloody waist (Bella).

Bella presented several photographs of herself wearing smart clothing (see *Figures 22 and 23*).



Figure 22: Photograph by Bella (blurred for anonymity)

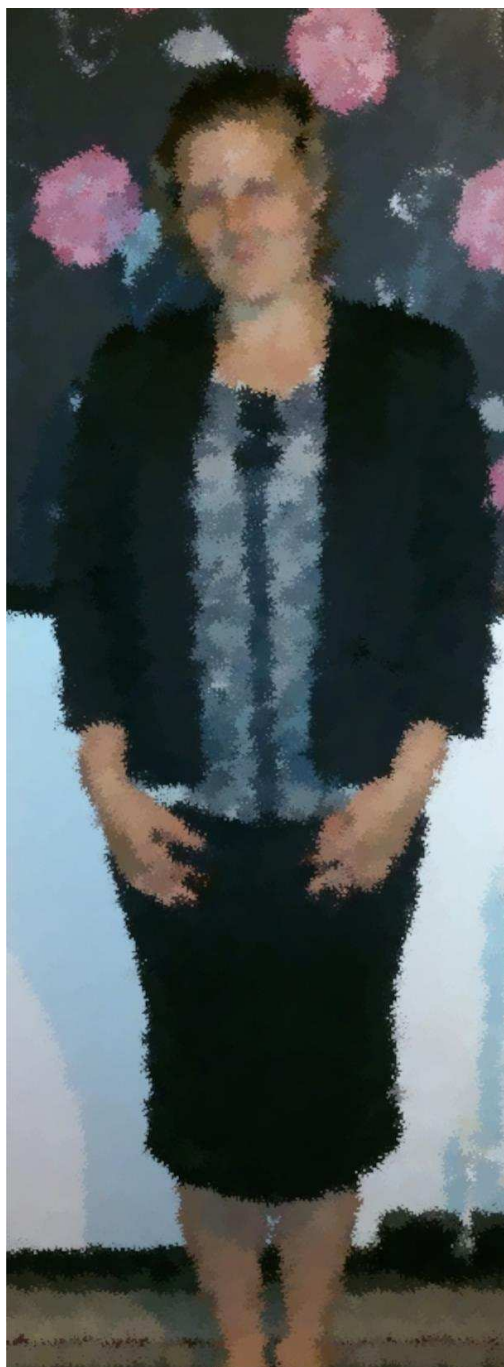


Figure 23: Photograph by Bella (blurred for anonymity)

When talking about these photographs, Bella told me:

B: Oh, that's me, erm, with my interview clothes on. So whenever I get a job, erm, I've got interview clothes. Erm, that was with help from my key worker. Erm, she helped me get a Trust Loan.

L: What's that?

B: Well, you don't like pay it back, it's like when you're on a low income and you can't afford to get your own interview clothes....

L: And did you... did you get to choose the clothes yourself then?

B: Oh yeah. Erm, but the jacket I chose, that was from me and my key worker, 'cause she said it was like, it's more like fashionable... and, err, you could use it when you like go out and that so it was like a fashionable jacket to wear when you wanna go out around town or you wanna go out for a meal or whatever you've got like a nice jacket, well, suitable jacket to wear when you're, err, going out or summat (Bella).

Bella received financial help, in the form of a Trust Loan to buy her interview clothes with, as well as advice from her key worker: being assisted to find a jacket which is both 'fashionable' and 'suitable' for numerous occasions (an interview, going out 'around town', or going out for a meal). What is interesting to note here is that Bella was assisted in how to perform a certain identity (a good interviewee identity): in picking out a jacket for Bella, her key worker told her how to perform as smart, as a respectable woman, a good interviewee, and a potential trustworthy employee. This implies that some homeless women have limited scope to choose and construct their own identity performances. When asked how she felt wearing the interview clothes, Bella replied: 'Just felt weird 'cause I'm always in jeans all time, so it's like... just feels really, really weird, to be honest with you'. Although performing a different identity, Bella felt 'weird', mostly out of her comfort zone, whilst wearing these smart clothes that were not in her usual style, clothes that someone else had picked out. As Croghan *et al* posit:

...poverty and limited access to material resources can severely limit young people's opportunities to fully take up the identities potentially available to them: a form of exclusion that implicates the self-concept as well as material or physical well-being (2006: 474).

While Bella lacked the financial resources to purchase her own interview clothes, she also had to rely on funding from her Trust Loan as well as the involvement of her key worker in choosing her clothes. Bella was unable to fully participate in the practices associated with style display and identity performance (Goffman, 1959), but was partly reliant on institutional provision. Certain style choices invoke a series of associated identity attributes that mark the individual out as a particular sort of person (Croghan *et al*, 2006). Whilst everyone, to a certain degree, is subject to discourse about what is 'suitable' to wear, we are not all subjected to the same degrees of surveillance (being accompanied to the shops by a key worker, for

instance). A woman's homeless status and place of residence may therefore narrow the horizon for identity performance.

Taking pride in their appearance was one way in which the women in this study performed a respectable identity, distancing themselves from their stigmatised 'homeless' identities, and maintaining a valorised sense of self. Their performance of a 'respectable self' distanced them somewhat from their homelessness, as well as more stigmatised homeless people (Casey *et al*, 2008). There was almost a kind of discipline to these practices, or a 'technology of the self', a way of working on one's body in an effort to improve one's situation. It was mentioned in the introduction to this section that marginalised women have limited access to the resources needed to perform a desirable identity through dress and appearance.

As Skeggs (1997: 1) found, women – notably, working-class or marginalised women – have to work harder to prove that they have value, to be accepted: 'respectability is usually the concern of those who are not seen to have it'. Skeggs also reminds us that respectability is pursued in order to cast off the 'dirt' associated with a working-class status. The same was often true for homeless women. For Frankie and Jo, as well as for many of the other women in this study, the price paid for not appearing respectable would be a lot greater: they would risk being associated with their homeless status. In contrast, Jules noted how easy it was to disguise her homeless status; that if anyone walked past her on the street, they would never guess she was homeless because she dressed 'quite smart'. Still, the label 'homeless', when applied to women has been used to signify all that is dirty, usually encompassed by the specific label of 'bag lady'. It is no surprise, then, that the women used appearance as a mechanism to avoid this classification.

These performances, however, were limited by past identity performances (in terms of class), contemporary discourses (what is deemed 'suitable' and 'respectable'), as well as physical and social locations (their economic status, marginality and residence in homeless accommodation).

Social Chameleons?

Following Goffman (1959), many of the women in this study talked of having multiple selves, or different performances in different contexts and around different people. This supports the idea that people are able to switch between different identities and facets of their identity, and don different 'masks' in different situations (Goffman, 1959). If individuals have multiple identities, and perform these in different contexts as Goffman (1959) argues, then a 'spoiled' homeless status does not have to be the overriding aspect of a person's self. As Kilty (2003: 80) said of 'criminalised identities', 'the criminalised identity does not evaporate; but through self-care it can be pushed inward into a fold or cleavage that allows for the newly negotiated self to be on display to others'. This idea of pushing one stigmatised facet of the self inward and allowing other more reformed selves to be displayed to others is something which came through in this work. Frankie told me how 'deep down I have a very soft core... I portray myself as being quite chatty and quite... but when it hurts me it really, really hurts me'. Frankie's 'soft core' was hidden from others, or pushed inward, and replaced with an outward display of 'chattiness'.

Most of the women acknowledged that they acted differently in different situations, and that this was normal ('everyone does that, don't they?' Gretel). Gretel described one time when she had to undergo a sudden shift in her identity performance:

Like yesterday, I went to a job fair and I was really hyperactive and I was talking to one of 'em, and then I heard him say my advisor's name from job centre, I thought 'Oh fuck'. Then she was stood right there and all of a sudden I just went bright red and I was like right, no, I don't act like that. [laughs] (Gretel).

This quote shows how Gretel's identity performance shifted depending on the audience. Gretel described her feelings of embarrassment at being caught in her 'hyperactive' role when her advisor from the job centre turned up unexpectedly; an official bearing influence over the receipt of her benefits, who she did 'not act like that' around. Surveillance systems tend to make individuals increasingly

aware of themselves as visible objects, under the gaze of those in authority (Collinson, 2003). Instead of becoming 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1995), Collinson (2003: 538) suggests that we can become 'skilled manipulators of self, reputation and image in the eyes of 'significant others'. While homeless women are often subject to increased forms of surveillance, it does not mean that they must always assume a 'conforming self' (Collinson, 2003). In the case of Gretel, appearing to conform was something which she could switch on and off at will, leaving times for her to act how she wished, whether 'hyperactive' or something else.

Katie described how people in her hostel 'feed off each other', suggesting that she saw her identity as relational and audience-dependent. Katie mentioned how she would not normally go out of her way to buy 'weed', but if people were smoking it outside, then she would 'probably be there':

L: Erm, this is like, you know because my project's about identity... I was gonna ask you just about, like, do you kind of see yourself behaving differently in different situations or with different people or in different places?

K: All time. Yeah, all time. Yeah, that's definitely me. Erm, yeah, it's like I say... if somebody was in a situation where they were outside and they were smoking weed or summat daft like that, then probably, yeah, I'd probably be there. But it's not summat I'd go out and buy and do or summat. But then I can say same people for me... if people go out and see me drinking, they drink when they don't usually drink. So I think everybody feeds off each other (Katie).

Jenny was sure to perform a 'mature', professional identity when at work:

...at work I have to be, I have to be really mature obviously as a professional so I'm not gonna like step outta line at work, I'm gonna take it serious, you know. Erm, so yeah, you change, you kinda get into work mode. Err, then back to who you are, so I suppose I am changing (Jenny).

In the above quote, Jenny mentioned being able to 'get into work mode' and 'then back to who you are', suggesting the ability to consciously switch on and off different roles and performances to negotiate differing situations. Saying that she could go 'back to [who she is]' suggests that Jenny is somehow 'not herself' when at work, hinting at the idea of 'real' and 'false' selves. Leah expressed a similar view:

I don't know... I'm just not myself round everyone. But like my close friends I can be a total weirdo. It doesn't bother me. I dunno, I don't really care what people think of me though because if they don't like me for me then it's not my fault. I'd rather be me than pretend to be someone I'm not (Leah).

The idea that she is not herself around everyone again suggests that Leah holds a notion of a 'real' and 'fake' self: the real one being hidden around certain audiences. Many of the women's words point to an idea of a hidden 'real' or 'authentic' self that at times must be hidden and replaced with an alternative display or 'mask' in order to negotiate everyday situations (whether continuing to receive benefits, keeping a job, not appearing vulnerable or fitting in with others). The idea of the subject who possesses 'unique essence of human nature' that is fixed (Weedon, 1997: 77) has been critiqued by critical and post-structural scholars (Tracy and Trethwey, 2005). Yet, it appears that traces of this modernist idea still exist in the popular imagination and everyday vocabulary. As Kilty (2003: 71) suggests, there is a need to move past a mutually exclusive explanation of identity construction as being either fixed or fluid, and toward one that allows for an understanding of identity as being both fixed and fluid.

Within each of the participants' accounts, outlined above, we see that identity is open to negotiation and re-negotiation, through the individual's ability to perform differently in a given situation, and to different audiences. It also gives weight to conceptualisations which do not see identity as representing the core, or the singular self (Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1990). Understanding this using Goffman's (1959) notion of the 'dramaturgical self' and the idea of the active and conscious performance grants women more agency. Applying Butler's (1990) work to the findings acknowledges how identity formation is inscribed by the regulatory power of discourse. Nevertheless, the routinised discourses of 'what it is to be homeless' can be overcome as women perform as something else entirely. It seems more likely that Goffman's (1959) conceptualisations of individuals as knowledgeable and creative agents are more fitting (and considerably more optimistic) for the women in this study and their deliberately staged performances for a particular audience and setting.

7.5. Conclusion

Informed by theoretical lenses which posit identity as being fluid, multiple and performative (Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1990; Gergen, 1991), this chapter has explored how the identities of women experiencing homelessness change and are negotiated. It has argued that homeless women construct a range of identities and put forward their own versions of self in spite of living with a stigmatised or 'spoiled' homeless identity, which is seen as an impediment for maintaining or developing a 'positive' self-concept (Meanwell, 2013). Participants' enacted selves challenged the familiar stereotypes of homelessness, and homeless women in particular. Taking a more feminist approach to agency (McNay, 2000), it was argued that powerful discourses – such as homelessness – can be actively or passively resisted in massive or minute ways; that it is patronising to assume that marginalised individuals (whilst mostly lacking financial, social and/or political capital) lack the creativity to negotiate their identities within and against constraining social structures. Discussion has added to the gaps in knowledge around lesser-known identity negotiations by individuals with stigmatised identities and individuals undergoing new states of being and social changes, and poses a refreshing challenge to dominant stereotypes of homeless women as 'vulnerable', 'damaged', 'hopeless', and 'passive'.

In the theoretical framework, in Chapter Two, the diverse theories of identity drawn upon all emphasised the plurality, flexibility and fluidity of the self (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1994; Bauman, 2001; Gauntlett, 2008; Lawler, 2008). Identity was mostly seen as fluid – as different in different situations – but for Frankie, her identity was fixed in her former 'better' self. This leads to the conclusion that although identity may well be fluid to the extent of it being negotiable and performative, it is not always *seen* that way by all women in the midst of an unsettling life period. When life is felt as unstable, it may well be a coping mechanism to see the self as more solid, and less shifting. Identity is simultaneously something meaningful that can bring stability and coherence to everyday life (Ferguson, 2009).

Although it was clear that structures were at work in constraining the extent to which identities could be negotiated, evident across virtually all varieties of identity-negotiation was a sense of *creativity* and individual agency: 'positive' identity-pegs were fashioned; 'new' selves were created out of the 'old'; and identity performances were deliberately staged for particular contexts by the homeless women. Considered together, this suggests that the experience of homelessness has varying effects on a person's identity, but while it shapes identity to some extent, it is not an identity *per se*. In other words, while homelessness is not inconsequential to identity, neither is it an 'all-encompassing concept that captures one's entirety or true essence' (Parsell, 2011: 443). This chapter has shown that identity is malleable and that lack of social or financial capital does not prevent marginalised individuals from taking part in the shaping of their own identities. This chapter has, in fact, shown a side of the women distinct from their homelessness, an element that is missing from the literature on homelessness and identity: 'there is little consideration of identities beyond homelessness or the way the state of homelessness has implications for the way people have identities ascribed' (Parsell, 2011: 445).

As Stephen (2000: 458) states, 'notions of homelessness as a 'hopeless' state require modification'. Rather than entailing a loss of self (King *et al*, 2009) or marking an individual with a stigmatised identity (Goffman, 1963), homelessness prompted an amalgam of identity-negotiations as diverse as the individuals exercising them. Going through a period of homelessness even provided the trigger to prompt participants to create other identities, to reform the 'old' self, and to turn their lives and selves around.

Discussion has shown that 'homelessness', or loss of house, does not necessarily lead to a loss of home, as this was re-created elsewhere. Despite this, women still felt stigmatised by not having a 'real' home: a conventional house filled with a nuclear family, what is societally constructed as the norm. Women battled with the above, as well as the effects of homelessness (the label and actual home-loss) on the self, which was done in comparison to the 'other'. This battle was demonstrative of their agency rather than their acquiescence. A loss of house did

not lead to a total loss of self because 'home' was created elsewhere; homeless women engaged in a range of strategies to manage the 'homeless' label – not simply by 'embracing' homelessness (as argued by Snow and Anderson, 1987) but by re-appropriating it. This chapter has further evidenced these strategies to a greater extent by illustrating how the women used the experience of homelessness to their advantage, as a catalyst to reinvent themselves and better their lives in spite of constraining social and institutional factors. Although homelessness sometimes acted as a constraining force – often not allowing women full exercise of choice in their identity negotiations as the entrance into homelessness services brought with it both support and a kind of, at best, hand-holding, and at worst, surveillance – participants still had the ability to shift within their identities, to negotiate who they were and who they wanted to be seen as, by leaning on different aspects of their selves (as in Sections 7.3 and 7.4) and by using the experience of homelessness as a catalyst for positive change and self-improvement.

8. Conclusion

8.1. Introduction

This thesis has uncovered how homeless women construct a sense of self in the context of their becoming homeless; it looked at how homelessness affected the self and how such effects on the self were dealt with. This thesis has given prominence to women's voices in a field which has – despite recent advances – been dominated by men's voices made to stand in as the universal. Within such work, accounts typically paint homelessness in androgynous terms, as a male preserve, a struggle faced by the 'bearded, dirty male' (Austerberry and Watson, 1983) on the streets. This thesis sought to redress the balance of research and to answer Klodawsky's (2006) critique that women experiencing homelessness have either been forgotten altogether as a category or have featured only as a reference to something else. To draw this thesis to a close, this chapter reflects on the research aims and questions, brings together key findings, and discusses these in relation to the broader theoretical framework. The chapter will end by looking to future avenues for research.

The introduction to this thesis set out four research questions, to address the overall research objective of exploring **how homelessness affects women's identity and sense of self**. These research questions were as follows:

1. What does 'home' mean to women who have become homeless?
2. How does a loss of home impact on identity?
3. How do women respond to and/or resist the stigma associated with homelessness?
4. How do women construct their identities within and beyond their homelessness?

This was an exploratory piece of research that aimed to problematise the notion of homelessness; and to explore whether the term was fitting for those falling under

that category and how the application of homelessness as an identifier had an effect on the women experiencing it.

8.2. Key Conclusions and Contributions

This thesis has offered further understandings of the concepts of home and homelessness and contributed to existing understandings of concepts of identity, especially in relation to marginalised groups, women and those experiencing homelessness. In this section, I draw out the main conclusions to emerge from this study, focusing on those that most advance knowledge. These are:

- Just as there are multiple home-spheres there are multiple homelessnesesses
- While 'home' can be re-created in 'homeless' spaces, women are still aware of and affected by the stigma of being categorised as 'homeless'
- Women go beyond rejecting and/or resisting the stigma of homelessness by using the experience of homelessness as a catalyst to reinvent or 'better' themselves and;
- Despite occupying a stigmatised social category, and believing to be seen as stigmatised, homeless women presented other more desirable images of self at different times and in different contexts by leaning on different aspects of the self.

1. There are multiple 'home spheres' and multiple homelessnesesses

This study suggests that homelessness and 'home' are both multi-dimensional concepts. While others have acknowledged the multiplicity of the term 'home' (Haraway, 1985; Young, 2002; Easthope, 2004), rarely has it been argued that, as a result of there being more than one home, there is also more than one homelessness.

Home exists simultaneously as a physical and an emotional entity; it can be a feeling of belonging, of being around like-minded/caring others, or a meaningful space where one feels at ease. Home, then, transcends the physical dwelling for homeless women – emotionally, women can find a home when 'homeless', where there is little sense of one when 'housed'. This is possible because home can be a subjective concept, acknowledged by Easthope (2004: 134) as a 'socio-spatial entity' and a 'psycho-spatial entity'. However, the women in this study also held normative, popular meanings of home: as a house, as 'the domestic', or as a familial 'bricks and mortar' entity. The loss or absence of home through homelessness was not, therefore, easily resolved simply by making a new, emotional home. Even women who had (re)created home in temporary accommodation still harboured longings for the kind of home that is socially conventional: the 'house', referred to here as the 'real home'.

Home, then, was conceptualised in a variety of forms all at once for the women – as fondly and selectively recalled past houses; as states of mind; as close relationships or a sense of belonging; as a future and difficult-to-obtain 'ideal' home; or as the conventional/societally accepted house (the 'real home'). Because of the pull of these different 'home spheres' at different times, women also felt home-less in different ways. This explains how women could feel a sense of home in the hostels while still feeling the sting of lacking a 'real home' at the same time. A woman can thus feel homed in one sense but home-less in another, at the same point in time.

Due to the complexity of women's notion of home, their sense of their homelessness is not contingent on, or defined by point of entry into homelessness services. It is neither definitionally or experientially straightforward. Differences emerge between homelessness as an official label, as a category one is placed into when seeking housing support ('homelessness'), and home-lessness, the state or feeling of being without a home (whatever that might be to that individual).

I suggest that the duality of homelessness is usefully encapsulated by the notion of 'home-loss'. This goes beyond the superficiality of the label and avoids the loaded connotations, binaries and stereotypes of 'homelessness'. Home-loss captures the

loss of home-feeling, whatever that might be for a particular woman, and includes feeling home-lessness in the house, with family, and could be felt at various points in life, spanning beyond the limits of entering homeless accommodation.

I also suggest that the concept of the 'unheimlich' is a useful way of framing and understanding the complexities of the relationship between home(d) and home-less. The unheimlich helps to deconstruct the dualistic, oppositional divide that exists between 'home' and 'homeless' and reframes it not just as a continuum (Watson and Austerberry, 1986) but also as a relationship of vacillation and inversion, so that one can exist *within* the other. Here, home was found in 'homeless' spaces and home-lessness was found in the family 'home'/the house. Just as homelessness contains the root of 'home', so too does home conceal its supposed anti-thesis of 'homeless'. Rather than seeing home and homeless as two distinct states, this thesis concludes that it is more helpful to see them as part of the same process, as states or feelings with blurred edges. In this context, homelessness does not mean a necessary absence of home, and being 'homed' (as in a house) does not necessarily mean its presence. The label, 'homeless', did not succinctly capture the diversity or complexity of women's experiences in this study because of how it pigeonholes women into a fixed way of being. Neither homed nor home-less were permanent states for the women – they fluctuated and floated into and out of each one at different times and even within the same space. It was no surprise that homelessness could not be unproblematically tacked onto the women's identities.

The loss of house did not always have a negative impact on identity, as house did not equate to home and home could be made elsewhere in other spheres. At the same time, it did impact on identity since women felt the lack of a 'real home' - one 'that everybody else had' - and this profoundly affected the self and was felt as stigma, absence, and as not feeling like a 'complete person'. This leads on to the next key conclusion, that homelessness does affect the self because women recognised it as stigma.

2. Identity is social, relational and forged comparatively

While one home was present for the women in this study, another was absent. Even if the women felt at home in a hostel, when they measured themselves against others' standards of home (and self), they fell short. Homelessness was felt as a comparative lack: 'I'm homeless because I don't have the house society tells me I should have'.

It is because identity is relational that homelessness affects the self. By viewing home-lessness as an absence of home, and home as house, what homeless women value is undermined 'in the rush to draw them back into more conventional models of accommodation' (Moore, 2007: 152). For as long as homelessness is associated with the usual stereotypes and connotations, and as long as home is attached to mythic attributes, women will be aware that they do not fit the norm and feel stigmatised.

Returning to arguments in Chapter Two around the socialness of identity, and how the self is intrinsically connected to interactions with others as well as ideas and discourse from the social world, it is unsurprising that homeless women are aware of the stigmatised 'homeless' status and feel the effects of it because, of course, no one exists in a vacuum (Jenkins, 1996) and identities are relational (Hegel, [1807] (1977). Further, as set out in Chapter Two, individuals rely on others for validation of identity claims (Lawler, 2008). As found here, women felt their lack of home and their label of 'homeless' most keenly because of how they thought they measured up against others. Even when women had (re)established home in a hostel or elsewhere, and even if they actually felt 'at home' (and more homed than in their previous family houses), or viewed home as other than a house, societal attitudes around what constitutes a 'real home' came creeping back in to affect self-identity. Likewise, awareness of societal standards also affected how women actively avoided accepting the homeless label – even if they acknowledged that they were indeed homeless – because of its stigmatised status and associations. Homelessness did not simply affect the self in and of itself, it affected the self because identity is relational and social, and forged through comparative

processes: women felt homeless because others were housed, even though they often rejected the homeless label and associated stereotypes.

Where this work differs from other studies exploring stigma is in its emphasis: where other works take it for granted that certain social groups are stigmatised as a starting point, mine questions and complicates the existence of stigma, finding that women do not necessarily identify with their stigma *per se*; they do feel stigmatised that they are homeless (or ashamed about being homeless), but feel stigmatised because they do not fit the 'homed' category that society thinks they should. This study also found that occupying a stigmatised category does not have to be debilitating; the stigma of homelessness can be re-appropriated as a positive term, as some women saw it as a chance to make a change for the better.

3. Homelessness is a chance for transformation and reformation, not a profaned self

This study made clear what at first seems counter-intuitive: that homelessness provided an opportunity for women to transform themselves. Homelessness prompted women to actively negotiate a new self out of the old *because of* the challenges it raised. Women altered their attitudes as a result of coping with these challenges, developing a stronger self, becoming more independent, determined, and focused. As an adjunct to this, participants also profaned both the past self (who they once were) and the future 'alter self' (who they would be if they had not sought support) (Bott, 2006). This is an original finding that runs counter to most homelessness literature (Snow and Anderson, 1987; Boydell *et al*, 2000) as well as my own initial assumptions that homelessness has a negative effect on the self.

This conclusion makes a wider contribution in terms of theoretical assumptions; it forces us to re-think the relationship between homelessness, or 'negative' changes in life, and effects on identity to suggest that homelessness does not necessarily equate to a sense of hopelessness. This finding goes beyond studies that show how the stigma of homelessness is resisted (Juhila, 2004; Roschelle and Kaufman, 2004; Harter *et al*, 2005); it illustrates how the experience of homelessness might work to someone's advantage, in that it acts as a catalyst for re-invention and change in

spite of constraining social and institutional factors. This is about more than resistance and disidentification (Skeggs, 1997); it is about using the period in homeless accommodation as a kind of metamorphosis. The women used this time to reflect on what they saw as past mistakes, to settle down and become more stable and prove they were competent mothers and independent women. This finding may be contrasted to studies in the field of homelessness, that largely found that the homeless self was the one which was devalued, rather than the past self. Whereas Boydell *et al* (2000) contend that homelessness is 'a threat to identity' (p. 35) and Snow and Anderson (1987) found ways in which the 'homeless identity' was always something to be overcome or deviated from, this research found that in homelessness, present selves were re-valued and re-evaluated; it was the past that women distanced themselves from.

This study therefore adds to the limited body of work focusing on the strengths of homeless people (Montgomery, 1994), and moves away from that which places emphasis on the 'disease aspects' of homelessness (Boydell *et al*, 2000: 36). These differences might well exist since this research focused on homeless women in hostels, whereas others (Snow and Anderson, 1987) interviewed predominantly homeless men who were sleeping rough. It would be interesting to explore whether conclusions would have been different here if the women interviewed were rough sleeping, lacking a roof, or not accessing a framework of support.

4. Autonomous subjects/gender renegades?

This thesis has shown that identity is malleable and fluid to the extent that an individual can negotiate within and beyond the identity categories prescribed to them. Women identified with other axes of belonging unrelated to their housing status, including their employment, hobbies, friends and relatives, and these assumed a much more prominent position in their lives than where they lived. Despite occupying a stigmatised social category, and believing to be seen as stigmatised, homeless women presented other more desirable images of self at different times and in different contexts by leaning on different aspects of the self.

Those occupying marginalised positions do, then, adopt reflexive positions in relation to them.

This concurs with Giddens' (1991) view that the self is not simply influenced by external forces but is heavily involved in shaping them; that the self is a project to be worked on; and that this has become an inescapable feature of late Western capitalism. This conclusion supports elements of the individualisation thesis, the idea that 'given' forms of identity are being replaced by 'open' practices of personal choice and reflexivity (Mythen, 2005: 132) and 'do-it-yourself' biographies (Beck, 1994: 15). It was noted in Chapter Two that this change, while being freeing for some, might pose a dilemma and risk for others (notably for marginalised others) (Beck, 1999; Bauman and Vecchi, 2004). Homeless individuals have long been marked as 'helpless', unable to take responsibility for their own lives (Juhila, 2004), tasked with 'responsibilisation discourses' (Whiteford, 2010), and forced to enter homeless accommodation for lack of a better alternative.

At first glance, then, homeless women appear as the antithesis of the individualisation thesis, the ones it left behind and without the social or economic capital (Bourdieu, 1979) to negotiate categories, positions, and identities. Yet, this thesis shows evidence of an engagement in a 'project of the self' (Giddens, 1990), as women used the experience of homelessness to better themselves. Through appearance and work, women folded their homeless self inwards and performed as something/someone else; a respectable, hard-working citizen, not in an attempt to divert stigma but because this was who they were. Homelessness and the above were not incompatible.

However, although women re-negotiated their selves in terms of homelessness, they were nevertheless constrained as to what/who else they could be. Thus, Giddens' (1991) 'project of the self' and individualisation theses may be at play to an extent – and identities are malleable to an extent – but choices/performances are limited by discourse (Butler, 1990) and other structural constraints. While homeless women re-invented themselves from the confines of the homeless identity, other identities were pulled from a finite repertoire of pre-existing ways

of being and therefore not completely free and malleable after all. Still, performing positive identity pegs was used as a means of managing the socially stigmatised self, for keeping the homeless status at bay. However, the reinvented/re-negotiated self is a bridge between identity malleability on the one hand and social conformity on the other (in that, it is replaced by a more socially accepted role/identity).

This thesis has also grappled with the question of access to this multiplicity of identities to find that it was possible for homeless women to reject stereotypes and adopt other personas deliberately for different audiences and settings. Performance was simultaneously a protection against a hostile social world and an exercise of choice and agency. Women are specifically increasingly positioned as 'self-governing individuals' (McRobbie, 2004), 'attributed with freedom, independence, and the capacity for success in education and the labour market' (Allen and Osgood, 2009: 2). In the climate of this neo-liberalistic thinking, anyone seen as peripheral to the individualised, autonomous and ambitious woman, according to McRobbie (2008: 7) is 'more emphatically condemned for their lack of status and other failings than would have been the case in the past'. Homeless women have been said to occupy this group (Watson and Austerberry, 1986; Golden, 1992; Wardhaugh, 1999), as have shelter/hostel residents: 'Neoliberalism appreciates responsible citizens and claims that a welfare state can create an unhealthy dependency culture among some groups of citizens' (Juhila, 2004: 260).

In contrast, this study found that it was often as a result of taking a firm decision, of exercising responsibility and seeking independence that women chose to move to a hostel, to leave behind their former lives, partners, houses and make a 'fresh start'. This shatters the presumptive link between homelessness (and homeless women) and a sense of dependency or failure. Actually, women chose to enter hostels to begin to make a success of themselves. To an extent, then, in contrast to 'undeserving poor'/dependency discourses, women may become homeless, can enter homeless accommodation, at the same time as taking responsibility for their own lives.

In relation to home, homeless women have also been referred to as 'gender renegades' who have rejected, or been rejected by, traditional family and domestic structures (Wardhaugh, 1999: 91), because women for the most part have been associated with the home (Massey, 1992). In this sense, the women in this study were, to an extent, individualised, autonomous and agentic subjects in this context, similar to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) observation that women are increasingly moving away from 'living a life for others' to living 'a life of one's own'. Women, in this study, by moving out of the family home to a flat or 'room of one's own' (Woolf, 1929) were taking on more individual responsibility. But, as noted in Chapter Two, with more responsibility comes more risk and this was evident among some women as they clung to notions of traditional homes and a fixed identity instead.

It was argued in Chapter Two that identity is multiple and fluid (Lawler, 2008), but it was not always felt that way by all of the women in this study. Some clung to fixed notions of self as well as home – notable in how Frankie described her identity in a way that she was not herself at all, in fact she wasn't anyone, if she wasn't who she wanted to be. Frankie's past self was somehow more real for her than who she was now, suggesting that identity is not always thought of or lived as fluid, complicating recent theoretical debates around the fluidity of identity. When investigated empirically, then, the contemporary theories of 'identity as fluid' do not always stand up, echoing Ferguson's (2009) and Kilty's (2003) acknowledgement that a fixed notion of selfhood persists in the day-to-day. While a plural, fluid self allows women scope for manoeuvre in their identities/away from their social identities, it might not offer any form of comfort for other women who find that a retreat to the past self brings a form of stability.

8.3. Where do we go from here?

Although homelessness poses a threat to identity and impact on the self, in order to move away from images of homelessness as a 'hopeless state' (Stephen, 2000: 458), more work is needed focusing on the strengths of homeless people (Boydell *et al*, 2000), around how homelessness might provide opportunities or positive

outcomes for those experiencing it, just as this work showed how it prompted women to reform and transform the self. The majority of work takes a one-sided view that homelessness necessarily has a negative effect on identity when, as this work shows, it was sometimes a more positive time (in terms of working on the self) and finding a sense of home. More work is needed in this area to address this gap and to develop a more nuanced understanding of homelessness as something more (or other) than a 'loss of home'.

Diversifying from a focus on the 'disease aspects' of homelessness and those experiencing it might allow for an alteration of discourse, which depicts homeless people as needy, hopeless or dependent. A different story needs to be told in order to delegitimise the stigma and stereotypes surrounding homelessness, responsible for affecting how homeless women come to see themselves and their homes. One way of doing this would be to open up space for homeless women (and other marginalised groups) to tell their stories in their own words, be it through more participatory research, or more 'grassroots' channels. To this end, I hope to contribute in a small way to this need by publishing findings from this thesis in non-academic as well as academic outlets to bring the women's stories and photographs to a broader audience. Once the dominant narratives of homelessness are broken down, the effects might become more manageable and women might have the space to fight more important battles other than ones around stigma.

Work is also required that looks beyond simple identity hierarchies of either accepting or embracing a homeless identity. More theoretical engagement with debates around identity would be one way of doing this. Women used much more complex strategies than simply succumbing to or rejecting the 'homeless label' (or developing strategies to manage it). When one sees identity as more malleable, the possibilities for (re)negotiation of self multiply. Indeed, the women in this study used homelessness to reinvent themselves; they reclaimed it; 'talked back' to it; and they were many things apart from it.

Still more work is needed which looks at home and homelessness as gendered. While advances have been made in more recent years around this subject, there is

still much more work that remains to be done. The stereotypical homeless person is still the 'bearded, dirty male' (Austerberry and Watson, 1983) and homeless women still remain hidden in media portrayals and in the popular imagination.

In another vein, deeper consideration needs to be given to the use and application of the term 'homelessness'. Further exploration and deconstruction of the binary between home and homelessness is necessary to de-myth the association of home with the domestic house, and homelessness with a lack or loss of home. This might be done by highlighting further examples of the uncanny processes of inversion at work between the two: where home occurs in traditionally 'homeless' spaces and where the 'unheimlich' occurs in supposedly 'homely' spaces. I hope to have made some contribution to these developments by re-thinking and re-imagining these terms throughout this thesis.

8.4. Limitations

I hope this research has much to contribute theoretically, empirically and methodologically, but there are things that might have been done differently had I had the luxury of more time, resources and not having to stick to the rather rigid structures of a PhD thesis. It would, perhaps, have benefited the study to have employed a more participatory approach, allowing more involvement, input and control by the women; a photo-voice approach would have allowed for this. This study, restricted by various tropes of a university thesis involved participants to the extent of allowing them to take their own photographs, thereby dictating the flow of conversation to an extent but it did not (or could not) consult participants initially at the start to define the 'research problem', aims and questions; this was done with reference to the literature. Photo-voice aims to support participants to define, communicate, and improve their situations through empowerment. It is doubtful that taking part in this study made a significant difference to the women's lives – although they did enjoy the process and it might have impacted positively on their self-esteem for a short time.

Given more time, this study might also have benefited from a greater number of participants, if it had been possible to spend the same amount of time with them. This may have given a greater diversity of homeless experiences to see whether findings held true across different forms of homelessness. It would be interesting to find out if homelessness provided a chance for transformation for women on the streets, or if it was restricted to those accessing support services. The study might also have been enhanced if it had been possible to take a longitudinal approach. Findings evidence only a snapshot of the effects of homelessness on the self over a very brief period of time (a few months at most). Would the findings have been different/more or less optimistic if I had made repeated visits to the women, from the time they entered the homeless services to when they left? It would be interesting to explore different forms of homelessness as they are being lived, as opposed to them being (selectively) recalled.

8.5. Visualising Homelessness: Reflections on a Photographic Methodology

The combined visual methods of auto-photography and photo-elicitation were employed in this research, with a feminist research approach in mind, as a vehicle through which homeless women – a seldom heard group in policy, research and cultural climates – might be heard. Photography was chosen as an accessible and fun (Lombard, 2012) method, facilitative of rapport (Langa, 2008) and agency. My intention was to employ methods from a feminist perspective in ways that might deconstruct hierarchical power relations between researcher and participant, even more important with subjects who are marginalised.

In Chapter Four, I argued that photo methods have the potential to facilitate communication and rapport, which better enables the participants' expressions of self-identity on their own terms. Had it not been for the use of visual methods, many of the important themes to emerge – around relationships and hobbies for example – would not have emerged.

Researchers use photo methods to facilitate talk (Meo, 2010), especially among groups for whom traditional verbal methods might be exclusionary. While Meo (2010) found that photo-elicitation interviews inspired more talk, as well as lengthier responses, this was not always the case here. Although they elicited different data, they did not necessarily elicit more data. This was possibly due to the tropes of looking through photographs and the expected time one spends lingering on one photo, perhaps shortened further with the increase in smart/camera phones where users typically flick through pictures quite rapidly. This is an important acknowledgement for the field of visual studies and one that has not yet been raised.

A further advantage was, as Lombard (2012) states, their element of fun. All participants gave positive feedback, noting the photography exercise as their favourite element of the process. This 'novelty factor' is a useful way of recruiting participants, maintaining their interest throughout the process, and 'giving something back'. Participants looked forward to getting their photo prints back and displaying them in the photo exhibition. This is particularly important for the homelessness field, or indeed for any research with 'hard-to-reach' groups difficult to engage in the research process.

Visual methods offered portrayals of participants' lives that deepened understandings from the verbal interviews. They proved to be valuable in breaking down usual research hierarchies by allowing participants control of the camera and their accompanying narratives. Given the subjective, intangible and fluid aspects of identity, photographs and other visual methods are a useful means of exploring the subject. This work contributes methodologically to the ever-growing body of work in the homelessness field using visual methods (Aitken and Wingate, 1993; Wang *et al*, 2000; Young and Barrett, 2001; Radley *et al*, 2005; Radley *et al*, 2006; Hodgetts *et al*, 2008; Johnsen *et al*, 2008; Clover, 2011; Padgett *et al*, 2013). Like in Johnsen *et al*'s (2008: 205) study, visual methods provided 'new windows' into the worlds of homeless women; offering insight into previously unknown experiences of homelessness that are not present in the literature.

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Appendix 1: Email to Homelessness Services

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Lindsey McCarthy and I am currently studying for a PhD at the **Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research** at Sheffield Hallam University.

I am researching the following topic: 'How women who are experiencing homelessness choose to express their identities through **participatory visual methods**'.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to counter the negative stereotypes and images of homeless women in society. My research gives priority to gender, an aspect often overlooked in much homelessness research. The research has been formally approved by Sheffield Hallam University's Ethics Committee, and I have undergone an enhanced CRB check at this institution.

In order to research the above topic, I am seeking the voluntary participation of women who are experiencing issues around home and housing.

I am hoping to conduct several in-depth interviews with participants, but the main part of the project will involve a **photography exercise** which will invite participants to create their own images of anything which makes up their identities. Each participant will receive a gift of £15, either in cash or vouchers, or whatever your guidelines will allow, to thank them for their time and efforts.

I would also be willing to create a display in the centre, create a blog, or be open to suggestions from the women as to what else to do with the images; any feedback would be appreciated.

I would be willing to discuss my research and methods with you in more detail, to explain all relevant issues and to answer any questions. I apologise for any inconvenience caused if this research does not fit the remit of your organisation. If you are aware of any organisations that might be interested, I would be very grateful if you could contact me with your suggestions.

Thank you for your time.

Best Regards,

Lindsey

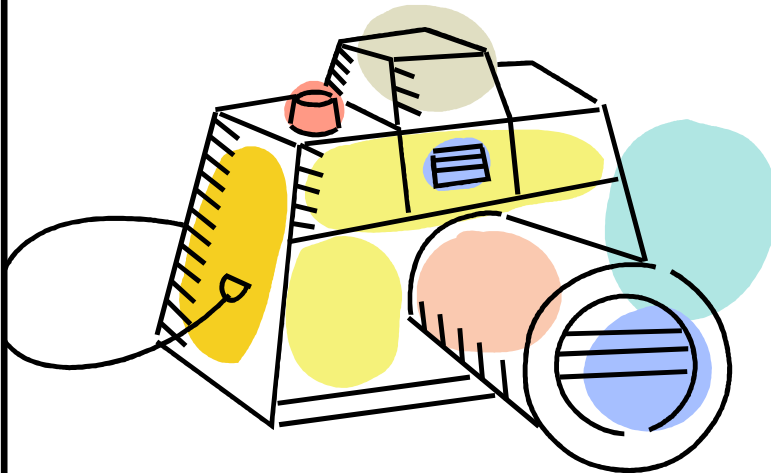
Appendix 2: Recruitment Flyer

Women and Homelessness

Photography Research Project

What is the research about?

This project explores how women experiencing homelessness express themselves and their daily lives. The purpose is to counter the negative images of homeless women in society.



How do I take part?

I would be grateful if you could take photos that will say something about who you are and what your daily life is like.

Who is conducting the research?

I'm a PhD student from the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University.

What are the benefits of the research?

You would be actively involved in a creative photography project; and will receive a cash gift of £15 as a thank you for your time.

Who can I contact for more information?

If you want to ask questions about the research you can contact Lindsey McCarthy at Ljmccarthy87@gmail.com / 07971 691 402 or 0114 225 3562.

Appendix 3: Background Interview Topic Guide

Background Interview Topic Guide

Overall Purpose: to elicit participants' initial thoughts and perceptions of their self-identity; to elicit some prior background information and personal history of participants to supplement themes which emerge from photography exercise and photo-elicitation interviews.

Themes:

Attempt to capture: past, present and future self-identities; relationships and interactions; change.

1. General background questions;
2. Daily aspects of present life/routine;
3. Homeless pathway and becoming homeless;
4. What it means to be a woman experiencing homelessness;

Opening Lines

5 mins

Thank you for taking part in the research.

My name/introduce self – age; where I grew up; hobbies; likes/dislikes.

Purpose of Interview – I would like to talk to you about how you see yourself and your life in general, to get a feel for what it is like, and things of importance to you.

Duration of Interview – should last about one hour, but if you want to stop before then that's fine, or if you would like to talk for longer that's also fine. There might be a possibility of a third interview similar to this one, if we don't have time to cover everything you want to today.

Consent – go through and sign consent form 1 and make sure participant understands each term. Reassure right to anonymity and confidentiality, but explain the choice to waive anonymity if they prefer, explain implications of this (or do this at end if I get a sense that they do not feel comfortable enough to sign at start).

Remind participant that they can take a break or stop the interview at any point, and do not have to talk about anything they don't want to: "If I ask you anything you don't want to answer or talk about just say, 'I'd rather not answer that' and I'll move straight on...and you will still get paid!"

Reassure participant that there are no right or wrong answers; all opinions are valid.

Ask if any questions before we start.

1. General background to participant/self-description/past/present/future 10 mins

Purpose: to find out the general introductory information about the participant; to explore participant's self-perceptions; and to identify general themes, raised as important, to explore later in the interview. If participant comfortable with drawing could produce a simple self-portrait.

a) "Tell me a bit about yourself"/simple factual questions...for example: -

... age/what year were you born?

...can you describe your current housing/living situation?

... length of time in...

... what was growing up like for you?

...what kind of family do you come from?

... how do you get along with family members?

... what are your likes/dislikes?

...can you describe your employment activity/types of past employment/current situation (i.e. working/not working/in education/looking after family)?

2. Daily aspects of present life/routine

10 mins

Purpose: aim to explore participant's day-to-day life and daily experiences.

a) How would you describe a typical day in your life?

What did you do yesterday?

What did you do on the weekend?

What's the best part of your day?

What's the worst part of your day?

Where's your favourite place to go during the day?

What's the most important thing to do in your day?

How do you cope with financial needs?

What do you keep with you in the day?

Why are these things important to you?

b) How do you interact with other people?

How has this changed?

Do you interact differently with different people (people who work/volunteer in homelessness services/friends and family/other members of the public)?

c) How do you think other people see you?

3. Homeless pathway/situation and becoming homeless

15 mins

Purpose: to explore participant's own views and feelings on becoming and being homeless; what homelessness means to them and if/to what extent they identify with this meaning; to explore what 'home' means to the participant.

a) Can you tell me a bit more about where you have lived before?

How did you feel living there?

How long is it since your last permanent address?

How does not having a permanent address make you feel?

b) Where or what is 'home' for you?

Where do you feel most at home?

Where do you feel most not-at-home?

Do you feel like you have a home now?

How is your present home different to your past home?

What would your ideal home be?

c) What does the word 'homeless' mean to you?

Do you see yourself as fitting into this definition? / Do you consider yourself to be homeless? / If not, can you tell me about why you do not?

How do you feel about the label of homelessness?

How do you differ from this definition?

How did becoming homeless make you feel?

Why did it make you feel this way?

How did you cope with these feelings?

How have these feelings changed?

When did you first consider yourself to be homeless?

What did you do before you became homeless?

What was your life like before you became homeless?

What do you think other people think 'homeless' means?

d) How did your current housing situation come about?

What factors do you think contributed to it?

How did it make you feel at first?

In what ways do you cope with these feelings?

Have these feelings changed now? In what ways?

How has the situation changed you?

How has it changed how you cope with things?

Is the way you see yourself now different from how you saw yourself in the past? How?

4. What it means to be a woman experiencing homelessness 10 mins

Purpose: to explore the participant's identity as a woman and her feelings about being a woman as well as being homeless.

a) What are the issues for you as a woman being homeless/in a difficult housing situation?

In what ways would your situation be different if you were a man, if any?

What do you think about support services for women - e.g. are there enough; have you accessed women-only services; what do you think about existing ones?

What factors influence your use/choice of hostels/day-centres/other services?

How do you feel about safety issues - are they different for women?

Has becoming homeless/inadequately housed changed how you feel or act as a woman?

In what ways do you think about your appearance?

b) Do you behave differently in different situations (e.g. when sleeping on the streets, begging, in a hostel, in a day centre, visiting friends, visiting family)?

Do you think you would behave differently if you were male and homeless?

c) What are your plans for the future?

Closing Lines/Summary

5 mins

Purpose: to round up the interview and close; to hand over disposable camera, guidance sheet and second consent form; and make sure participant feels comfortable to proceed to the photography exercise by giving a brief of the task.

Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

How did you feel about the interview process?

Next Stage – would you feel comfortable doing the photo exercise, or would you prefer to do this instead of or as well as something else? E.g. bringing in your own photos (on phone, Facebook, in purse etc.) and we can talk about those; drawing; just talking?

N.B.

Need to think about how the questions will translate into discussion.

Can be flexible; ask questions that are important to respondent; let respondent dictate the direction of discussion (to a certain extent).

Times are approximate; not all questions can be asked in one hour.

Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project carried out by a PhD student from The Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University.

What is the project about?

This project seeks to explore how women experiencing issues around housing or home express their identities. The purpose of the research is to counter the negative stereotypes and images of homeless women in society. The research focuses on homeless women in particular and gives priority to their voices.

What does the research involve?

Taking part in the project will involve: -

- meeting up with me at the start of the project to tell me a bit about yourself
- taking photographs with a disposable camera to document your identity and daily life
- talking to me about the photographs you took (for about 1 hour)

As a thank you for taking part, you will receive a £15 gift voucher (after the final interview).

Important information for people who participate

If you agree to participate:-

- your details will be held securely and will be treated as strictly confidential
- you will be provided with a disposable camera and your own set of photographs
- you have the right to remain anonymous and photographs including identifiable features will be blurred unless you give permission for them not to be
- you can withdraw from the study at any time during the research process, up until one year after the date of the final interview, and you will still receive your cash gift.
- your photographs and things you say in the interviews will be used in a PhD thesis and may be published in a book, articles or conference papers
- you do not have to talk about anything you would prefer not to discuss and can stop the interview at any time
- you have the right to exclude any photographs from the research if you decide to once they have been developed

If you would like any further information please contact: **Lindsey McCarthy** (07971 691402 / 0114 225 3562 or Ljmccarthy87@gmail.com).

Appendix 5: Participant Consent Form 1

Participant Consent Form

Please Circle

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study. I have had time to consider the information and ask questions.

Yes No

I agree to take part in the above study as described in the information sheet.

Yes No

I am aware that I will be guaranteed confidentiality and that I have the right to remain anonymous unless I give permission not to be.

Yes No

I agree to the interview being recorded and that I have the right to refuse to answer any questions I do not wish to answer.

Yes No

I understand that my consent is voluntary and I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the research process, up until one year after the date of the final interview, and this will not affect receipt of my gift voucher.

Yes No

I am aware that if I photograph any serious illegal activity (such as child abuse, sexual violence or terrorism) the researcher has the right to report it to the relevant authority.

Yes No

I am aware that the information I give will be used as part of a PhD thesis and may be published in the form of a book, articles, or conference papers and give my consent on this basis.

Yes No

Participant

Guardian

Researcher

Name.....

Name.....

Name.....

Signature.....

Signature.....

Signature.....

Date.....

Date.....

Date.....

**Sheffield
Hallam
University**

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Economic
and Social Research

Appendix 6: Participant Consent Form 2

Consent Form for People Appearing in Photographs

This form refers to the photographs as produced by the women at Doncaster Foyer as part of the above project, some of which you may appear in.

- As a way to showcase the women's photographs, we would like to present them along with accompanying text/captions in a one-off photographic exhibition at Doncaster Foyer.
- We will not display photographs which show friends or family members if you have not agreed to be identified.
- We would like to display images of yourselves, but only if your written consent is provided. Your right to anonymity will be respected.
- Cameras will not be allowed at the exhibition.

Please could you indicate below whether or not you are happy for us to use the photographs in the exhibition?

1. I agree to photographs of myself being displayed at the exhibition at Doncaster Foyer connected to the above project.....**YES/NO** (please circle)

2. I am happy to be identified in the photographs**YES/NO** (please circle)

Please sign:

Name.....

Signature.....

Date.....

Appendix 7: Participant Consent Form 3

Agreement to Photographs appearing in a PhD Thesis and possible book, articles, and conference papers

Are there any photographs that you **do not** want to appear in a thesis, book, articles or conference papers?

Photo number	Thesis, book, article, conference paper or all of the above?

I am happy to be identified in the photographs (if not, computer software can be used to blur facial features). Please circle.

.....YES/NO

Participant

Name.....

Signature.....

Date.....

Researcher

Name.....

Signature.....

Date.....

Appendix 8: Camera Guidance Notes

Hints and Tips for the Photography Exercise!

Here are some tips for completing the photography exercise: -



1. You could take pictures of objects...locations...people.
2. Don't discount something you see every day.
3. If you're struggling with what to photograph, think about: what it means to be you; how you see yourself; how you would like to tell your story; how you think others see you.
4. Most importantly, have fun, and don't worry too much – there is no 'right' or 'wrong' picture!

If you would like any further guidance please contact: Lindsey McCarthy (0114 225 3562, 07971 691 402 or Ljmccarthy87@gmail.com).

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Appendix 9: Participant Evaluation Form Example

Women and Homelessness project
with Lindsey McCarthy

1. Was the project explained to you in enough detail ?

yes, with option ^{given} ~~given~~ + examples as a guide.

2. Were you happy with the photo's you produced ?

yes very.

3. Do you think they capture who you are ?

yes, my personality.

4. Are you happy to show your photos as a display of who you are?

yes sure.

5. What was the best part of the project for you ?

writing up the summary - explaining the photos.

6. What was the worst part of the project for you ?

~~Not~~ Not clear enough photographs.

7. What could have made this project better ?

cam-corder + recording a mini video rather than photos, this would be more

8. Would you like to do another project using photography, is so what would you like to do next ?

yes, something to do with psychology + young people.